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*Bertha; or, The
consequences of a fault*

Louise Boyeldieu d'Auvigny, Mary Huntington

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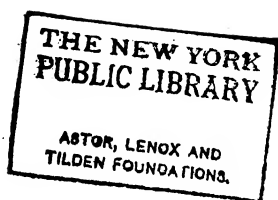
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BERTHA.



Terrified at what she had heard, she burst into tears and fell on her knees before her brother. (Page 69.)

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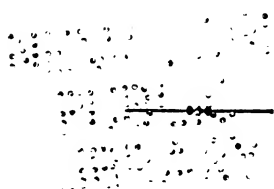
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THE CONSEQUENCES OF A FAULT.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

MRS. MARY HUNTINGTON.



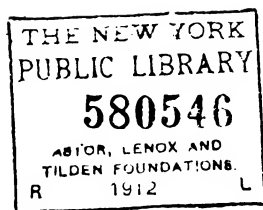
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BERTHA.

I.

THE CHATTERBOX.

BERTHA DAVID was a most charming child. Her pretty features, her small and delicate figure, and her gracious manners attracted at the first glance, while her gay and lively temper, her loving heart, her gentle and obliging disposition, seemed to render her worthy of the affection of all who knew her. And yet no one liked Bertha; for, with her many good qualities, she was an incessant talker, which made her an object of weariness, contempt, and even of dread to all who approached her. Her mother's health was extremely delicate, and this circumstance, joined to the blind tenderness which she had for her daughter, her only child, hindered her from reproving these defects with the necessary severity. Then, as unfortunately it too often happens, the friends of the family, to please Mrs. David, who was generally beloved for her gentleness and benevolence, dared not repulse Bertha as she deserved, when she wearied them with her prattle; they endured it, lest

they should distress her mother. Some even pretended to hear with interest her little tales, and the child, finding herself listened to with indulgence, at last believed herself somebody, and redoubled her chattering, thinking thus to make herself more agreeable.

Mr. David was a very distinguished lawyer, who united the utmost discretion to the most perfect integrity; therefore he had the confidence of a great number of wealthy families, and as his conciliatory disposition had often brought peace where others had only found occasion to enrich themselves by prolonging disputes, he was beloved and esteemed by his numerous clients, who confided to him without reserve those important secrets which most nearly interested their honor. His fortune was moderate, but he hoped to increase it by his labor. He enjoyed, in a word, that most worthy recompense of an honorable and laborious man, a conscience without reproach and a spotless reputation.

Mr. David had married a second time, and he had a son by his first wife. Andrew was twenty years old, and as accomplished as the heart of a father could desire. He had studied hard; his character was serious and thoughtful; of an indefatigable activity, he promised to become full of zeal and devotion for whatever interests might be confided to him; therefore, Mr. David looked forward with pleasure to the day when he should be able securely to leave his practice to his son, with the hope of seeing him fulfill honorably the charge intrusted to him. Bertha was only nine years old, and Andrew loved her very much;

but he was grieved to see her spoil her natural charms by an endless chattering. Several times he endeavored to reprove her for it, but he perceived that his words, in spite of their gentleness, irritated the little girl, accustomed to see herself idolized. He feared, moreover, to afflict his mother; therefore he spoke of it no more, hoping that time and experience would correct his young sister.

Andrew loved Mrs. David as if she had been his mother; he had never known his own, and from his infancy he had received such tender care from his father's second wife, that he could not have loved his own mother more. Afterward, when, being grown up, he could better appreciate all that she had done for him, he repaid her goodness by an extreme and grateful tenderness and an untiring devotion.

The most touching union existed, then, in the family of Mr. David, and he himself would have been perfectly happy but for the fears which Bertha's character caused him. He could not conceal from himself that this perpetual talking, though a slight defect in appearance, brings often in its train very grave disorders, and spoils the happiest gifts of nature; therefore he often sought to correct his daughter by wise remonstrances, and by little stories illustrating the miseries which may be caused by a gossip. Bertha, who had a good heart, was very much moved. She would throw herself upon her father's neck, embrace him, and beg his pardon; and Mr. David, softened by these caresses, believed in her repentance. An hour afterward, she recommenced her tattling.

While little Miss David was a child, and her necessity of talking exercised itself only upon her doll and toys, the evil was not so great ; but when she became older, her chattering became also more serious. She formed the habit of repeating at random what she had seen and heard, telling one what another had said in a moment of impatience: every thing was arranged to suit herself ; for the desire to talk and to make herself heard rendered her careless in regard to the means ; and without calculating the evil which she might do, every thing served her purpose, provided that she could talk. Not content, then, with repeating things as they had happened, she often, to give more weight to her stories, augmented or distorted the circumstances, so that the principal fact could hardly be recognized ; in this way, she caused much mischief, without suspecting it, and mistook for attention the painful astonishment which her stories excited. Still, Bertha was not a liar ; if she falsified the truth sometimes, it was only through the desire of prolonging her discourse, and without thinking of the harm which might result from it. As she was very amiable, she would have been quite unhappy if she could have seen all the trouble which she often caused to her best friends. Then she talked so fast, that she did not understand herself, and if some one repeated to her what she had said, she could not believe it. All falsehood was so far from her intention, that, with the best faith in the world, she would insist that she knew nothing about it. If some person who had heard her, maintained that she had said so and so, she defended

herself, in her turn, with so much the more tenacity, as she was persuaded that she was right. This gave rise to endless little altercations, in which she became angry, and then one looked in vain for that sweetness of temper which formerly had distinguished her. At last, she acquired the reputation of being an obstinate girl. And all this was the result of gossiping.

Her young companions left her one by one, because Bertha had often excited quarrels among them by a thousand little stories, false or true. She caused the servants to be scolded every day, by reporting, quite incorrectly, what she had seen them do ; for her eagerness to tell all that she knew prevented her from examining actions thoroughly, and the most innocent thing, commented upon by her, was converted into a fault. The servants, in their turn, waited upon her unwillingly, called her a spy, and revenged themselves by doing her a thousand ill turns, through which she found herself humbled and unhappy, without knowing of whom to complain. With much intelligence, she was yet very ignorant ; for she was always so eager to know that which did not concern her, that she had no time to learn her lessons, or attend to her duties. Her masters, vexed and discouraged by her want of application, under pretext of other occupations, returned to her no more. Often this deplorable defect turned against herself. The necessity of having something to say had made Bertha very indiscreet ; and to satisfy this insatiable desire, I must confess it, children, she did not hesitate to pry into things which others wished to hide from her ! But,

as I have said, her indiscretions often turned against herself. If her mother's birthday approached, and her father and brother wished to prepare for her some surprise, they took care, for greater security, to say not a word of it to Bertha. But she, by prying about, at last discovered all the mystery; an indiscreet word revealed to Mrs. David what was preparing for her; the entertainment miscarried, and Bertha was deprived of the pleasure which she had anticipated. If she conducted herself well for some days, and her duties were better fulfilled, so that her parents wished to reward her by some little present, she went spying about everywhere until she discovered it; then there was no reason for rewarding an indiscreet little girl, and though she wept, her father was inflexible, and the present was sent back to the shop.

After this glimpse of her character, you will understand, my children, how, with good qualities, Bertha was liked by no one, and how, with all that could make her happy, she was still very unhappy, always scolded, repulsed, and avoided; for she carried trouble with her, and was mixed up in a thousand tales. Several times, Mr. David thought of sending her to a boarding-school, hoping that the strictness of the rule and the severe justice of the children would correct her; but Mrs. David begged him so earnestly not to separate them, that he dared not insist, fearing to distress his wife and injure her health. A serious circumstance, which might have had unfortunate results, came to his aid.

II.

THE UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

AMONG the clients of Mr. David was a Mr. Fratz, an old German, very rich, but of a remarkable and Quaker-like simplicity.

You know, my children, that the Quakers are a sect whose members affect a great severity of morals and manners; their garments are fashioned without ornament, and they make use only of that which is rigorously necessary. Mr. Fratz occupied an apartment furnished with taste, but without any luxury; his dress was exquisitely neat, and at the same time very modest. By those who knew him only slightly, Mr. Fratz was reputed a miser, but the unfortunate, who knew him well, knew that three fourths of his revenues passed into their hands, and they all blessed him as their benefactor.

Good Mr. Fratz had a nephew, whom his sister, in dying, had confided to him, and whom he loved with all his heart. This young man differed on all points from his uncle; he was as prodigal, dissipated, as fond of pleasures and luxury, as his uncle was regular, economical, and benevolent. Mr. Fratz was always full of indulgence for Hermann's faults. "Youth must pass," he would say; "and, besides, who of us has not some peccadilloes with which to reproach himself?"

Sometimes he made gentle remonstrances, to which the young man always listened with the utmost respect. He knew that the concluding words would be, "Go, scapegrace, do not begin again, and send me the account of your debts, for I shall have to pay them." But Mr. Fratz was so often obliged to renew his advice and to pay the debts, that he judged it prudent to give his nephew a lesson.

Mr. Fratz was growing old; he might die at any time, and then what would become of his friends, the poor, if his heir, occupied wholly with his pleasures, never thought of caring for them? He had, indeed, the intention of giving them a small share in his will; but he loved the prodigal child too much to wish to thwart him in any thing; and then his fortune, though considerable, might, perhaps, not suffice for his nephew's extravagant desires. The idea that one day his dear Hermann might find himself in distress troubled the good old man. He knew by experience the truth of the beautiful proverb, "Luxury has ruined many families; charity and benevolence have never impoverished one." It was, then, as much for Hermann's good as to induce him to think of the unhappy that he endeavored to correct him. Too just to deprive him of a heritage which rightfully belonged to him, he wished at least to make him fear that he would disinherit him if he did not reform his conduct.

He came then to see Mr. David, and make known his trouble. "Hermann," said he, "has incurred new debts; this time I will not pay them at once, and I beg

of you to make him understand that I will never consent to do it, unless he will promise to incur no more, and unless he will yield at last to my desire, in accepting this office which he has hitherto refused. On this condition, I will, perhaps, after a while pardon him, see him again, and assist him to pay his debts, when I shall be convinced that he is resolved to contract no more, and that he has become steady and economical. As to my fortune, he must not count on it. I regard my wealth only as a trust which God has confided to me, of which He has made me the treasurer, in order that I may distribute it to the unhappy. Tell Hermann that I will never name as my heir a dissipated man, who will not accept as I do this holy mission; tell him that such is my inflexible will, and that I will rather name a stranger as my legatee than an unworthy nephew! You understand," added Mr. Fratz with a smile, "that I have no intention of disinheriting the young scamp; but I wish to see him change a little. And then," continued he, sighing, "I should be very much distressed, if, in dying, I left my poor friends without support."

Mr. David promised the good man that his will should be executed, and that all necessary discretion should be used in the affair. Unhappily, he had not seen Bertha, who, seated behind a curtain, played with her doll, and had not lost a word of the conversation. She loved Mr. Fratz very much, for he, seeing her only rarely, did not know what a tattler she really was. Her prattle had sometimes amused him; he found her charming, caressed her, and once, when

some one reproved her before him, he said, smiling, "Bah! we have all been children, and for my part, I prefer to leave youth all its *naïveté* and frankness; I like to have children act and speak freely."

The little girl had remembered these words, the better as they were accompanied by some very nice *bon-bons*; and she repeated very often afterward, when reprimanded, that there were *people* who did not find her so disagreeable as they said. She did not reflect that these *people* had seen her only once or twice, in calling, and that they could not have been fatigued by her continual chattering, and could not calculate its mischievous consequences. This day, when Bertha perceived Mr. Fratz, she was about to rise to bid him good-morning; but his sad and serious face prevented her, and as she feared lest her father should send her out of the room, in which she had installed herself with her toys, she crouched down behind one of the large damask curtains, and began to play in silence. Presently, these words of Mr. Fratz, "My friend, I have come to speak to you of a serious affair," attracted her attention. A prudent and discreet little girl would have retired; she, on the contrary, seduced by the idea of learning a secret, held her breath lest she should lose a word.

Mr. David was about to show Mr. Fratz out, when Bertha, rising from her hiding-place, and fearing to be caught, ran into her chamber, where she began to reflect on what she had heard. The truth is, that she had not understood much of it. "Why, then," said she, "does Mr. Fratz wish his nephew, who is rich, to

shut himself up all day and work? It is not necessary, and I do not see why people work when there is no need of it. For my part, when I am grown up, I shall do nothing at all. I will go to see my friends; I will make visits or receive them all day; and as I shall be amiable, every one will come to my house; we will talk and laugh; I shall let every body speak loud in my drawing-rooms, even little girls. It is so nice when every one is gay, and when there is a great deal of noise! Decidedly, I wish to be rich, and to do nothing! Yes; but why does Mr. Fratz wish his nephew to work? And then this idea of making him believe that he will not give him money to pay his debts, when, on the contrary, he means to pay them! And then where is the use of telling him that he will not leave him his fortune, when he means to leave it to him? Dear me! how cross Mr. Fratz was to-day!"

Bertha laid aside her doll, and ran into her mother's room. She would have wished to tell her what she had learned, to have the pleasure of saying how disagreeable she had found Mr. Fratz this morning; but she dared not, fearing that she had done wrong in remaining to hear what her father and he said. Finally, unable to contain herself any longer, she made bold to say, "Mr. Fratz was here just now."

Mrs. David appeared not to hear; Bertha repeated, after a moment, "Mr. Fratz came into papa's office to talk of important affairs."

Her mother looked at her fixedly, and replied severely, "That concerns neither you nor me."

Bertha cast down her eyes and was silent; but in the evening, on retiring, and while her nurse undressed her, she asked with a pensive air, "Say, Janet, do you know if an uncle has a right to give his fortune to his friends, instead of giving it to his nephew?"

Janet burst into a laugh. "What a fool you make of me, Miss Bertha! How does that concern me? If you wish to know, ask your papa; he will know."

That was precisely what Bertha did not intend to do, and she was again obliged to hold her tongue.

The next day, Hermann came to see Mr. David, and had a long conference with him. When he left the agent's office, he was much depressed; his eyes were red and swollen, and he seemed overwhelmed. Bertha saw him pass. "If Mr. Hermann knew what I know," said she, with an important air, to the servant who was dusting the furniture in the drawing-room, "he would not be so sad, I am sure."

"You!" said the servant, laughing, "I don't believe that you know much."

"You don't believe? Well, you are mistaken, you see, for I know why Mr. Fratz came yesterday, and why Mr. Hermann is sad, and why he cried; for that he has cried, I am sure, for his eyes were red."

"Go along," said Baptiste; "you know nothing about it."

"I assure you that I know all about it; but I will not tell you, you see!"

"What harm will that do me?" replied Baptiste, turning away. "You always have a heap of stories to tell us in which there is not a word of truth."

“Not a word of truth!” replied Bertha. “As if I had not heard it all with my own ears! Very well, so much the worse for them; they shall know nothing about it; I will keep it all to myself.”

But this was not so easy a thing for Bertha.

III.

INDISCRETION.

SOME days after, Hermann returned. Bertha was alone with her nurse; her mother had gone out, and her father was occupied with a client. The young man was pale and sad, but less depressed than the first time. He was shown into the parlor, the door of which remained half open; Bertha thought it was shut. "It appears," said she to her maid, "that Mr. Hermann has taken his choice; he has just come from his office, I am sure. It must seem very tiresome to him to remain always shut up so, he who is not accustomed to it; but he is right, after all, since it is the condition on which his uncle leaves him his fortune; and then he must pay his debts!"

"What are you saying, Miss Bertha?" said Janet. "You talk and talk."

"Yes, I talk," replied the little girl, "but I say the truth!" And then she added very rapidly, as if she feared to be stopped, "I tell you that the other day, when Mr. Fratz came into papa's office, he told him that he would pretend to be vexed with his nephew, in order to force him to work, and that he would seem not to be willing to pay his debts; and yet he has paid them; for you understand that Mr. Fratz is not vexed, and that he said all that only for fun."

The little gossip raised her eyes and stopped; Hermann stood before her trembling. He had recognized Bertha's voice, and had come to talk with her, for he found her very amusing. At first, hearing his name pronounced, he felt mortified to find his affairs known to the family; but very soon after this explanation of his uncle's conduct, he was so agitated that he had not the courage to interrupt Bertha. Finally, he cried, "What do you say, my dear child—is it possible? Come, in heaven's name, and tell me all this!" And he drew the little girl to him, who, bridling up, looked triumphantly at Janet. "You see," she seemed to say, "if I am not right, and if I am not an important person!"

They went into the parlor together. Hermann, in the greatest agitation, interrogated Bertha, who related all that had passed in her father's office, adding, in the form of commentary on the goodness of Mr. Fratz, sundry reflections which she had heard her parents make. "All that is very true," added she, in summing up. "I was hidden behind the curtain, and I did not lose a word. I am quite contented now to have been so discreet. What shall you do now? Shall you continue to go to your office? It is tiresome, is it not? Still, I advise you to do it, because Mr. Fratz said that on that condition he will pardon you. And then you must not seem to know all about it immediately, because he recommended to papa not to tell you, and perhaps I should be scolded; for you understand that I ought to know nothing about it," pursued Bertha with an air of confidence. But she might have talked

on a long time without being interrupted: *He* mann listened no longer; he had learned all *that* *he* wished to know, and, his head leaning upon his *hand*, he reflected deeply, without paying any more *attention* to her words than he would have done to the *monotonous* sound of a mill-clapper.

Mr. David at this moment entered. Bertha *stopped*, very much confused, while Hermann started *up*, and with clasped hands ran to him. "In heaven's name, sir," cried he, "is what this child tells me *true*? Will my uncle consent to pardon me? Oh! *speak*, sir. Do not fear that I shall fall into my past errors, and that I shall profit by my uncle's indulgence in order to abuse it!" Mr. David looked angrily at Bertha, who hung her head and ran away. "Do not scold your daughter, sir," continued Hermann; "it is a great comfort that she has told me all this. I have suffered so much during the last week from the thought of *having lost* my uncle's affection, that he himself would have pitied me." And falling into a chair, he hid his face in his hands, sobbing audibly.

This repentance moved Mr. David; he would not hide from him what he had already learned through the indiscretion of his daughter, so sincere did Hermann's tears appear to him; he told him all the truth; but he also reminded him how inflexible Mr. Fratz was in his will. "When he learns that you know what he wished to conceal from you, perhaps he will hardly believe in your repentance," said he.

"Oh!" cried Hermann, "I will throw myself at my uncle's feet, and he will believe me! What I ask is

that he will restore to me his affection. As to his fortune, God, who sees my heart, knows that all the wealth of the world would not repay me for the loss of my uncle. Let us say no more of that; and to prove my repentance, I will work with courage, and show him that I am worthy of his confidence and his friendship; and he will be the first to bless Bertha's happy indiscretion!"

At this name, Mr. David sighed; for he trembled in thinking of the kind, but just and rigid character of Mr. Fratz, who would perhaps blame him for the faults of his child; and as he was very straightforward, he resolved to accompany Hermann himself, in order to tell Mr. Fratz all that had passed.

When they arrived, the old gentleman found his nephew so changed that the words died on his lips; he opened his arms to the prodigal child, who threw himself into them weeping. "What is all this, scapegrace?" said the uncle, in a caressing tone. "Calm yourself—let us see—why these tears?" Hermann covered with tears and kisses the old man's hands, exclaiming in a broken voice, "My uncle, my good uncle, pardon me—only say that you pardon me."

"Come, come, what is all this?" said Mr. Fratz, furtively drying his eyes; "I do believe that I am going to cry!"

As to Mr. David, he did not seek to disguise his emotion, nor to restrain his tears. "Will you explain to me then," said Mr. Fratz, attempting to assume a severe air, "what all this signifies, nephew, and why you are here, when I have sworn to see you

no more? Well, well," said he, seeing that at these words Hermann became as pale as a sheet, "my decision is not without appeal—I am not a terrible uncle, after all! But I wish to know why you are here?"

Here Mr. David came forward, and related all that had passed. "Oh! to be sure," said Mr. Fratz, laughing, and feeling what Mr. David must suffer. "Miss Bertha has a hand in it also! It seems that every body plots against me, and I shall have to pardon you. Go, graceless child," added he, turning toward his nephew, "since it is impossible for me to punish you. Besides, that hurts us both, and for the last week I have been quite miserable for want of having some one to scold; and you, my poor Hermann, you are pale and agitated. Goodness! do not get sick, at least!" Hermann gently leaned his head on his uncle's bosom. "Poor child!" pursued Mr. Fratz, "do you then love this poor old uncle?" He tenderly kissed Hermann's forehead, and peace was made.

"O uncle!" said the young man, "if you will be so good, permit your repentant nephew to live with you, to consecrate to you all the time which he can spare from the duties of his office! I renounce all my past follies; but I know, uncle, that I need guidance and support constantly during my life, and I wish to profit by your example."

"What!" cried the old man, whose face beamed with delight, "will you consent to share my solitude? You," added he, laughing, "the prince of dandies, so renowned for your follies and gayeties, will you become the companion of a poor old hermit?"

"Yes, uncle, that is my dearest wish."

"Come, come, that's well!"

"Then you will pardon me also?" said Mr. David, extending his hand.

"Pardon you, when I owe to you the greatest happiness of my life!—when I shall no longer be a morose old man, abandoned to the care of mercenaries, but shall live with my dear child! I should not pardon you, I ought rather to thank you! Still," said he, as if correcting himself, "I charge myself with speaking to Bertha; say nothing to her about it, I beg of you."

IV.

THE LESSON.

WHEN the dinner-hour arrived, Bertha came to the table trembling. She had remained all day in her chamber, fearing to see her father; she hardly dared embrace her mother when she returned from her visits. To her great astonishment, Mr. David said not a word in allusion to the affair of the morning; only her parents appeared more serious than usual. But as they talked with their ordinary tranquillity, she endeavored to resume her security, saying to herself, "Bah! that will be arranged!" Still, she felt uneasy. Dinner finished, she ran to seat herself in a corner of the parlor, and abstained all the evening from coming to frolic as usual with her father and brother, pretending to be very much occupied with reading a book which she had in her hand.

The next day, her father and mother went out together during the morning, and on their return, they let not a word escape from which she could learn where they had been. The house seemed sad to her, though she could not tell why; every one was busy, and no one seemed to notice her. Some goods were brought home, of which were made for her a dress of violet merino and some aprons of black serge; and without her mother inquiring whether she liked her

dress, as she frequently did. Her linen was marked with only a single number. Dear me! what does all that signify? Do they mean to send her to school? But her mother was very quiet, and did not appear so afflicted as was generally the case when that question was moved. Nothing had been said to her about it, therefore it could not be: as if parents were obliged to consult their children in regard to every thing that they do!

After some days, unable to contain herself any longer, she ventured to say to her maid, "My dear little Janet, tell me why you are arranging all my clothes in this way?"

"Because your mother wishes it," replied Janet.

"I know that," replied Bertha, with a submissive air; "but why does she wish it? Is it because—is it because they are going to send me to school?"

"And if it was," said the girl brusquely, and fearing to say too much, "would it be any great harm? At school you would have to keep the rule, and no one here would regret you, you may be sure!"

Bertha rose at these words with a swelling heart, and slowly walked away. The idea of going to school, and leaving her kind parents, pained her very much, and she wept quietly, without daring to complain. Several times they surprised her drying her eyes, when some small articles were brought in which her mother had ordered for her; but no one seemed to notice it. Her conscience told her that if she were going to school, it was to punish her indiscretion in regard to Hermann; still, no one had spoken of it,

and she hoped that all that had been forgotten. She even desired to see Mr. Fratz again, for she remembered that once when it was proposed to send her to school, he had called while the question was pending, and had persuaded her father to put it off.

At last, Mr. Fratz arrived with Hermann. Bertha blushed on seeing them together; but as they seemed to be very good friends, she took courage, and came to shake hands with Mr. Fratz. The old gentleman sat down, drew her toward him, and kissed her forehead. Encouraged by this reception, Bertha said in a low voice,

"Mr. Fratz, I am very unhappy."

"And why, my child?"

"Because I believe that they are going to send me to school."

"And you are afraid to go to school?"

"Oh! yes," said she, with a deep sigh. "But if you will speak to papa about it, perhaps he will keep me at home."

"That does not concern me, and we ought not to meddle in the affairs of others, unless our advice is asked." Bertha reddened. "But you, why did you not ask him to keep you at home, when he spoke to you about it?"

"Because—papa has not told me that he means to send me there."

"Then what makes you think that you are going?"

"Because I see that they are putting all my things in order," said the poor little girl, with tears in her eyes.

"And they have said nothing to you about it?"

"Oh! no, because papa and mamma are vexed with me."

"You have been naughty, then? What have you done?"

"Oh!" said Bertha, bursting into tears, "you know very well, Mr. Fratz; but if you will pardon me, I am very sure that all the rest will pardon me!"

For a moment, Mr. Fratz felt softened, but the affair was too serious, and he restrained himself. He made it a rule to speak the truth to children; so placing Bertha between his knees, he said kindly, "Yes, my child, I know all about it; I know also that they are going to send you to school, and when your father spoke to me of it, I strongly advised him to do it; so you see that I can not now ask him to keep you at home."

"But I am very sorry, Mr. Fratz!" cried Bertha, "and I assure you that I will correct myself, and that I will never tattle any more."

"My child," replied the old gentleman, "I wish to believe you; but it is necessary, before your father can pardon you, that he should be convinced of your repentance. The fault which you have committed is very serious, more serious than you think. Imagine what might have happened, if I had not chosen to listen to Mr. David when he brought Hermann to me. I might have believed that they had agreed to deceive me; that your father had been indiscreet; that he had broken the promise which he made me, and I might have had no more confidence in him. I might have

thought that Hermann only pretended to repent, in order to have my money ; I might have repulsed him, and the poor fellow, who loves me so much, would have died of grief. Do you understand now the fault which you have committed? Your father, my dear little girl, is intrusted with very important affairs ; people confide in him because he is a man of honor, and incapable of betraying a secret ; but if it were known that there is in his house a little spy, who goes repeating to one and to another that which she ought not to know, who hides herself in order to hear conversations which are intended to be kept secret, every one would withdraw from your father—not on his account, for he is an honest man whom every one respects, but on your account, whose chattering might cause so much mischief. And then what would become of you, my poor child, if your father could no longer support and maintain you ? What would become of your mother, whose delicate health requires so much care ? And your brother ? My poor little girl, do you know how many misfortunes might result from one indiscretion on your part ? Do you know that if some one dared accuse your father of indiscretion, in the presence of your brother, this poor Andrew, whom you love so much, might fancy himself obliged to fight, and might be killed ?”

Bertha trembled. “All that frightens you, my dear child,” said Mr. Fratz, “but it might happen ; you are no longer so young, but that you ought to comprehend and appreciate the truth of what I say. Remember that the tongue of a tattler is like a two-edg-

ed sword, and that its wounds are often mortal. You see, your father is right to send you to school in order to correct you; and your mother, who always dreaded being separated from you, feels the necessity of it so deeply that she will not say a word to keep you at home."

"That is true," cried Bertha; "and yet, Mr. Fratz, I promise you that I will correct myself."

"Very well, my child; and I promise you, in my turn, that as soon as I shall see your fault corrected, I will be the first to beg for your return home."

So saying, he tenderly embraced Bertha, and left her reflecting deeply upon all that had been said to her.

That evening, before going to bed, and when she was about to bid her parents good-night, the little girl threw herself into their arms and begged pardon for her indiscretion; she accused herself with so much frankness and contrition, that they were really touched. They told her that she was to go to school the next day; but they promised her also that the time which she would remain there would depend upon herself, and that she should return home as soon as no further complaints were made of her chattering and of her curiosity.

Bertha, somewhat reconciled with herself, and touched by the goodness of her parents, went to bed full of good dispositions, and remained awake some time, forming the finest projects in the world for her future conduct.

The next day, she left home very sorrowfully;

still, she had, in leaving, the satisfaction to see that the family seemed to regret her a little, in spite of her faults. Her brother wished to accompany her to the school, and on leaving her, gave her several pretty presents.

Bertha wept bitterly at parting from her mother ; but at her age, sorrow does not last long. The school-mistress conducted her into the midst of her new companions, to whom, in her honor, she gave a recess for the remainder of the day. She ran about in the garden, and in a very short time was the *intimate friend* of two among the scholars, who—must we confess it ?—soon knew many details in regard to the internal arrangements of Mr. David's family. For, unfortunately, a defect so deeply rooted is corrected only with the greatest difficulty, and by applying to its correction the utmost perseverance.

V.

THE SCHOOL.

DURING the earlier part of Bertha's first term at school, the novelty of surrounding objects, the rule to which she was obliged to submit, the pleasure of having many playmates always at hand—all, in a word, contributed to divert her; and, thanks to the diversion caused by all these circumstances, she yielded much less to her fatal inclination.

She soon repented of having, on the very first day, related to her friends a thousand little details in regard to her family; for she recalled the advice of her old friend, and the assistant-teacher had made gentle remonstrances on this subject, which reminded her of the wise lessons of Mr. Fratz, and she promised herself to be more circumspect.

But she was unconsciously making provision for future tales; and the first day that she returned to visit her parents, her mother having asked some questions in regard to the school, she believed herself authorized in telling all that she knew—not only things which concerned herself, but all the little circumstances which interested such and such of her companions. She talked for two hours, relating what this one had said, what that one had done, and with such volubility, that she only perceived, in con-

cluding, the sorrowful expression with which her mother regarded her, and her father's evident displeasure.

"As I have no need," said Mr. David quietly, "to know the history of your little companions, or to learn what they may have done of good or bad, and as you do not need to entertain us with your babble, you will not profit, as a discreet and reserved little girl might do, by your days of vacation. You will, in future, return home only once in two months, and if this punishment is not sufficient to correct you, you will not be allowed to come home at all."

Bertha immediately acknowledged her fault; she begged her father to forgive her; but it was in vain, he was inflexible. Her mother, with a heavy heart, and eyes filled with tears, and Andrew, who kissed her sorrowfully, dared not say any thing in her favor, so fully did they recognize the justice of this decision. Bertha returned to school, much depressed; for she loved her parents tenderly, and the idea of not seeing them again for a long time grieved her very much.

As Bertha knew nothing, she had been placed, in spite of her ten years, in one of the lowest classes. It was the rule of the school that each of the older pupils should charge herself with the direction of one of the little ones. At recreation, each *little mamma* called her little girl, questioned her on her conduct in the class, and reprimanded or praised her, which caused much emulation among the little ones. Bertha was too old to have a *little mamma*; she found herself among the pupils of the middle

class. Still, her beauty caused her to be petted and caressed by the older girls, whom her babble amused; which was a great misfortune for her, for she recovered, so to say, all the pleasure and indulgence of her father's house. The desire of shining, of meriting the praises which the pupils blindly bestowed upon what they called her wit, caused her to redouble her chattering; she believed herself quite a personage, and she regarded with pity her little companions, who, more modest and timid, knew not how to attract the attention of the first class.

Very soon, as one easily sees, she limited herself no longer to relating what was true, and facts failing her, she found it very easy to make up stories for herself. Every day, she invented new ones, which she embellished with a thousand extraordinary circumstances. The bursts of laughter which she excited, and which she placed to the account of admiration, emboldened her. Alas! how she deceived herself! They laughed at her imagination, but they despised her character; and not one of those who applauded her the most would have charged her with one of those little commissions which occasion among schoolmates an interchange of kind offices. No one had the least confidence in her, and often, if she had been less blinded by self-love, she would have seen how little they thought of her. Her little stories related, and the representation given, so to speak, they turned their backs, without thinking of her again. Was it a question of a promenade or

party of pleasure with which the teacher wished to indulge the pupils, each of the older girls hastened to ask permission for such or such a one of the middle class, but it always happened that no one had thought of Bertha. Or was there to be a play in the school, the parts were chosen and distributed, and only then it was discovered that Bertha had been forgotten; it had not occurred to any one that she would find pleasure in it. Some consoled themselves by saying, "Well, she will talk with those who are not acting just at the moment;" others again, "So much the better; she will not weary us with her talk." Very often the teacher was obliged to interfere, to prevent her from remaining alone in a corner, like a mangy sheep, when it happened that her companions were not disposed to listen to her stories; and even this was always on condition that she should keep quiet, and not stun every one with her talk.

All this might have corrected her, but she had so much self-love, that it was enough for her to be listened to once, in order to forget all past humiliations, which, indeed, she did not regard as humiliations, fancying always that only the jealousy of others caused her at times to be repulsed.

She watched herself carefully, when she went to visit her mother, and thus showed herself a little more discreet. Besides, Mrs. David's health was steadily declining, and the fear of paining her rendered Mr. David very indulgent to his daughter.

Bertha was not happy, for her conscience was

not easy; she felt that she was not worthy of the affection of her parents, and that her companions might perhaps be right in avoiding her. One of them, named Sophie Belval, about fourteen years old, several times tried to give her good advice, and to induce her to be more discreet, by representing to her the harm which she might occasion to herself. But her advice was not well received.

Sophie was very much beloved by her companions for her gentleness, her evenness of temper, and, above all, for her tried discretion. All were eager to please her, and to obtain her friendship; they listened generally to what she proposed, and hastened to do it, for all the pupils were persuaded that she was right. They also avoided doing that which she seemed to blame.

Sophie, seeing that she could not influence Bertha, who despised her advice, tried to persuade her friends not to listen to her stories, hoping in this way to remove from her the temptation of telling them.

"When she sees," said she to them, "that no one comes to listen to her, she will drop the habit of talking so about every one."

But this time, Sophie's good advice was not taken.

"She is so droll," said her companions; "the thousand stories which she tells amuse us so much! And then, there is no great harm. You do not suppose that any one of us is so foolish as to believe a word of what she says!"

The imprudent young girls did not reflect on the

harm which they did to Bertha and to themselves ; for by adopting the habit of listening to the tattling and slanders of others, one very soon becomes a tattler in turn ; and, as the proverb says, " If there were no receivers, there would be no thieves," so we may say, " If there were no listeners, there would be no story-tellers."

Sophie blamed her companions ; but she had only the right to advise, and not to oblige her friends to do as she wished, nor to deprive them of what pleased them. She contented herself with protesting by her silence against their encouragement of Bertha. When the child commenced her tales, she quietly walked away, and when, in spite of herself, she was obliged to be present, far from laughing at her sallies of wit, or applauding her babble, she acknowledged frankly, not only that they displeased her, but also that she doubted Bertha's veracity, and with one single word she overset all the scaffolding of lies upon which her stories were built. Finally, she forbade the young pupil whom she had under her direction to form an intimacy with the little gossip. She hesitated long before deciding upon this, because she felt that Bertha would only dislike her the more on account of it, and that it would not induce her to correct herself. But she feared the bad example for the child confided to her care, and though it cost Sophie much, to give pain to any one, she was very strict on this point. As she expected, Bertha was furious, for Sophie's little pupil was one of her best friends ; but the child was docile, and obeyed

her "*little mamma*," who, moreover, had warned her of the distrust which one ought to feel in the friendship of a tattler.

The anger of the indiscreet little girl was so much the greater, as she had no means of manifesting it; she was obliged to keep it to herself; for, one day, when she attempted to ridicule Sophie, a few rather hard truths came forward to silence her. But she was on this account only the more irritated against Sophie, and resolved to do her as much harm as possible, if an occasion offered. From being gentle and kind, you can see that she became spiteful and malicious. I told you that gossiping led directly to all vices.

The time of the exhibition approached, at which time the pupils of the upper class gave to those of the preparatory class a prize for good conduct, which was awarded by a plurality of votes. Sophie's young pupil was so gentle and pleasing, that her schoolmates designated her beforehand as meriting the crown. Bertha thought, however, that she should obtain the prize. It is true that she worked very well, her masters were contented with her, and she was made so much of by the older girls, that she believed herself sure of their choice; but she began to perceive that she was not loved as much as she thought, and though she accused Sophie of this disfavor, she did not feel perfectly convinced of it. Unable to contend against her in the higher class, she wished at least to obtain the votes of the middle and preparatory classes, and to this end, endeavored to win her companions by

presents and caresses. When she went to visit her mother, she returned loaded with sugar-plums and toys, which she distributed generously to the most refractory. But she soon perceived that this was of no use; the little pupils surrounded her and listened to her chattering as long as the sweetmeats lasted, and then they went away to play together. As to the middle class, they called her *Miss Tattle*, and made fun of her while they crunched her burnt-almonds.

Bertha knew not which way to turn. Far from acknowledging her faults, and admitting that she had drawn upon herself, by her prating, the contempt of her companions, she accused Sophie of all her trouble. "But for that speckled magpie, Sophie," said she, "they would like me as they formerly did; it is she who has enticed every body away from me, in order to get the prize for that little mummy, whom she makes as stupid as she is herself. But I will settle all that." And she began to hate her little friend as much as she hated Sophie. Seeing that she could not obtain the prize herself, she resolved to hinder the little girl from having it, and endeavored to entice her into some fault, sometimes by making her lose her time through her stories, so that her task was not finished, or her lessons were ill-learned; and at other times, by quietly telling her in class some droll story, which caused the child to burst into a laugh. The teacher scolded, but immediately all voices were raised to accuse Bertha, and her malice rebounded upon herself.

At last the exhibition-day arrived, and Sophie's little pupil received the prize. Bertha was red with anger and jealousy; but this disappointment was the least of all. She had lost so much time herself in trying to injure her little companion, and she had so neglected her duties, that instead of the many prizes which she had pompously announced to her parents, and of which she was sure, she said, in her classes, she obtained, with great difficulty, a second honorable mention. Poor Mrs. David was ill with grief. Mr. David only said to his daughter, "I fear, my poor Bertha, that your tongue has been the cause of the little success which you have had in your studies. When we lose our time in talking, we have no time to work."

Mr. Fratz came in the evening to call on Mrs. David, and brought a very pretty desk for Bertha. "Where, then, are the prizes which we were to have had?" said he, embracing her. The little girl reddened and cast down her eyes; she was obliged to confess that she had only an honorable mention. Mr. Fratz replied tranquilly, "Well, my dear child, either you were not sure of those prizes which you promised us, and in that case you told a falsehood, and the necessity of talking has betrayed you into it, or you have committed some fault which has hindered you from obtaining them. Any way, you merit no reward. I will only give you this little piece of advice, my dear child: Remember that, in all cases, it is best not to talk too much. If you had not announced so many prizes—as you have been at school

but a very short time—we should have been contented with an honorable mention ; but you have permitted yourself to be carried away by your talk, and this desk, which was intended for a discreet little girl, can not belong to you.” So saying, he went away with his pretty present.

Bertha wept bitterly for shame, and for the loss of the desk, but not from repentance. She said to herself, “ Could not Sophie content herself with having taken all the prizes for her favorite, but must she also deprive me in my papa’s house of what was intended for me? I detest her ! but we shall see if I do not find means to do her harm in my turn ! ” You see how foolishly she reasoned ; and she was not merely foolish, but malicious also ; but malice is only a kind of folly, and both the malice and folly were the result of her talkativeness—her tongue was the cause of all her trouble. She wished to injure Sophie, as she had wished to take away the prize from her little school-mate ; but we shall see that she herself will suffer from it the most : God permits that the wicked should be stabbed by their own weapons, and that the arrows which they cast at others should glance back upon themselves.

VI.

MISS MEDDLER.

WHEN the vacation was over, and Bertha returned to school, she had forgotten the threats which she had uttered against Sophie; besides, she had not found occasion to put them in execution. Her companions, on their part, had lost sight of the annoyances which she caused them, and gave her a kind reception.

When young people meet after a month of separation, mutual prejudices disappear in the joy of seeing each other, and then all have so many things to say and to relate, that the most discreet and taciturn become talkative and communicative. So, during the first days, Bertha's talkativeness disappeared in the general tumult; then, when things were a little more calm, they began to regret the close of the vacation.

They had not yet the courage to resume the old games; they experienced a sort of lassitude caused by the noisy pleasures of the outside world, and a kind of apathy which would be gradually dissipated by the tranquillity of a regular life. So, Bertha's companions, little disposed to amuse themselves, found it very convenient that she would take the trouble to amuse them. They surrounded her, as in days past, to make her talk, and if the thousand stories which she

told excited incredulity, they occasioned also a little gayety, and that was considerable. Bertha, enchanted to have resumed her empire, redoubled her ardor—that is to say, her chattering, in order to maintain it, and yielded more and more to her indiscretions. But having become more adroit, she took pains to make herself necessary to some and dreaded by others.

Prying everywhere, asking questions about every thing, and as curious as she was talkative, she made no scruple of trying to discover what others wished to conceal from her; she succeeded in learning all the secrets of her companions, all the little rivalries which existed amongst them, and found herself often a witness of their slight quarrels, of which she profited to increase the catalogue of her anecdotes.

Sophie attempted to recommence in her behalf her charitable mission, but she shook her off as before. If any one asks why Sophie was so anxious to give advice to an obstinate little girl who received it so ill, we will explain it in two words. In the first place, Sophie, being naturally good, wished to see all her companions gentle and kind; then, as we have said, Bertha was so pretty and graceful, that her first appearance gained all hearts, and one could not help regretting to see qualities so amiable, spoiled by so grievous a defect. Finally, and this was the principal reason, she had learned during the vacation that Mr. Belval and Mr. David were very closely connected by their business, and the former had told his daughter that he should be much pleased to see her on friendly terms with little Miss David, and that she

should render her all the good offices in her power. This reason, as well as her natural goodness, induced Sophie to seek the friendship of the little rebel, who responded so ill to her advances.

Meanwhile, seeing that she gained nothing, fearing even that peace might be disturbed by Bertha's stories, who, interfering in every thing, had at last received the nickname of the *Little Meddler*, she begged her companions to admit the dangerous little spy no more into their class-room. She thought, moreover, that if Bertha were not so much petted by the older girls, she would try more to please those of her own age, and that being no longer stimulated to talk in order to display her wit, her self-love would be lessened, and she would be more willing to receive advice. But Sophie's friends refused to follow her prudent counsels; some through apathy, and others because they feared the indiscretion of the curious little girl, who had discovered many of their secrets.

Bertha very soon heard of Sophie's attempt to get her excluded from the recreations of the senior class, and it rekindled all her hatred. Miss Belval perceived it, and taking Bertha aside one day, she endeavored to show her all the imprudence of her conduct; telling her how it pained her to see her injure herself so much, and acknowledging that she was induced to advise her in this way by the knowledge which she had recently acquired of the intimacy existing between their families, adding that she was persuaded that Mr. David would be as much pleased as her own father to see them become good friends.

Bertha, instead of being touched by Sophie's kindness, only became more haughty. She said to herself, "If my father wished me to be intimate with Miss Belval, he would have said so; and, besides, I have never seen Mr. Belval at the house." This was true; for Mr. Belval traveled a great deal, and Mr. David, fearing Bertha's indiscretion, had adopted the rule of never speaking before her of any business matter, however indifferent, from the fear that she might repeat and misinterpret it. Bertha, then, pursuing her little soliloquy, asked herself, "Who is this Mr. Belval, after all? and how do I know whether the society of his daughter is suitable for me?"

This child, seeing the ease which reigned in her father's house, and which, as we have said, was due to Mr. David's toil, at last believed him very rich, and her pride increased accordingly. As she was somewhat spoiled, she had all those little superfluities which a child of her age can desire; while Sophie, deprived of her mother from her infancy, and brought up by a very strict father, had none of those indulgences which young people enjoy so much. What tokens of superiority in Bertha's eyes! So, little by little, she accustomed herself to regard Sophie as quite her inferior.

But the older pupils very soon repented of not having followed Sophie's advice: the Little Meddler meddled in every thing; through her the best friends were separated, and became enemies. She went about, relating what one had said of the other, arranging all to suit herself, and increase her importance; every

day she started new quarrels, new misunderstandings; on all sides were heard only complaints and reproaches. The recreations were spent in endless disputes and explanations; the school, formerly so quiet, became a pandemonium, and all owing to Bertha's mischievous tongue. The girls felt at last the necessity of putting a stop to all this confusion, and it was resolved that the little viper should be expelled from the recreations and banished from the classroom. But this was no longer easy to accomplish; Bertha had on her side all those whose consciences were not very clear, and whose little peccadilloes she had discovered; for they knew very well that, thanks to her, the slightest faults would become grave errors, if, in her anger, she chose to mention them.

There were formed, then, so to say, two factions—one guided by Sophie, and composed of all the reasonable heads; the other following Bertha, though unwillingly, in which were enrolled the idlers, who employed tricks to evade their duties, the deceitful, the gourmands, who knew how to conceal adroitly fruits and sugar-plums—all the bad scholars, in short; for Bertha was the confidante of all the bad that was done, and never of the good actions. What pleased her above all were the secrets which she discovered or pretended to discover, and which caused her sagacity to be admired. Now, good does not hide itself; those who have nothing to reproach themselves with, go always with the head erect, and have need neither of secrets nor of confidants.

At first, Bertha had been inquisitive through the

necessity of having something to say, something to tell, to relate; now she is so in order to govern; she will very soon become wicked! It was time that something should occur to arrest her on this fatal declivity. Providence watched over her, and prepared a lesson to correct her; and the lesson was terrible!

VII.

A GRAVE FAULT.

BERTHA, notwithstanding the species of royalty which she had acquired, or rather on account of that royalty, had become still more Sophie's enemy, but a secret enemy; for the young girl had a temper so sweet that all her companions loved her; and Bertha would have been ill-received, even by her *subjects*, if she had dared prefer the least accusation against Sophie. And then the reign of the wicked lasts but a short time.

Every day, Bertha saw the number of her allies diminish; for her schoolmates, wearied by her airs and threats, and, above all, tired of the quarrels which were continually arising in Bertha's camp, abandoned her little by little, preferring to run the risk of seeing their faults revealed, rather than to remain in the midst of perpetually recurring altercations. The little gossip, greatly humbled to see her power decrease each day, knew not upon whom to spend her sullen wrath, when accident furnished her with the means of humbling, in her turn, her of whom she thought she had so much reason to complain, but who had always treated her with perfect kindness. We shall see whether she had reason to felicitate herself on her revenge.

She did not believe in the friendly relations which existed between Mr. Belval and Mr. David; she had several times taken the pains to mention before her

father the name of Sophie Belval, and he had never appeared to notice it. "It is plain," she said to herself, "that he does not know Mr. Belval, and Sophie wished to see if I would be foolish enough to believe it and to take up such a friendship for her as the others have done. But to be sure, I do not know why they like her so much. She has a mean air, and then she is stupid; she has not a word to say!"

She imparted these reflections to some of her good friends, who found that she was quite right.

"You see," said one little flatterer, "Sophie was very well pleased to have that believed in the school; for one sees plainly that she is not rich; she never has any thing very handsome; she is always plainly dressed. She wished us to think that her father, who is poor, is the friend of your father, who is rich; for your father is rich, isn't he?"

"Oh! yes, very rich," said Bertha, bridling up.

"Very well! You see, I am sure that I am right; isn't it so, girls?"

"Yes," they all cried.

"And then perhaps she would have been pleased if you had taken her to your father's house. Sometimes acquaintances are made in that way among children. Mamma said so the other day."

"Ah! yes! let her come and ask me! No, indeed, I will not take her to *my* house!"

"And you are right. She would have wished, you see, to go and spend her vacations with you; for I believe she hasn't a very good time at home; while at your father's, in the country——"

"But we have no country-seat," replied Bertha, reddening with vexation.

"Not just now, but I am sure that Mr. David will buy one, he is so rich!"

"Oh! yes, certainly, he will buy one," said Bertha; "and since you have divined it, I will tell you a secret. Don't tell any one; it would mortify Sophie. They are talking, in fact, of buying a country-seat—a chateau."

"A chateau!"

"Yes, a little chateau, but superb!" added Bertha, to qualify the diminutive "little." "There are woods and water! Oh! it is beautiful!"

"Have you seen it? Where is it?"

"Oh! it is very far. But no matter; I will invite you all out there—yes, all; but not Sophie!"

"Oh! no, not Sophie!"

"You see, Emily," continued Bertha, turning toward the little flatterer, "though your mother is only a dress-maker, I prefer to have you for a friend, rather than Miss Sophie!"

The little girl bit her lip, and Bertha added, "And then I will give you my custom; your mother shall make my wedding-dress."

"What! are you going to be married?" demanded several of her companions, laughing.

"Oh!" she replied, "not yet." And she was about to add, "But I have heard them say—" when a stroke of the bell, announcing the end of recreation, put a stop to her confidences.

Having returned to her class, Bertha dreamed of

her country projects, instead of learning her lessons, and covered her blank-books with little houses having an infinite number of windows, and accompanied by little trees : these were her chateau and her park.

The next week, she went to visit her mother, whose birthday occurred during the week.

When she arrived, her parents had gone out, and she went into her father's office, where she had not been for a long time. Several changes had been made in the office, and in the disposition of the furniture. She examined every thing carefully, in order to have something to relate to her friends. She intended to tell them that her father had bought new furniture.

For greater exactitude, she began to open and shut the books, to fumble the papers, and to commit, in short, all imaginable indiscretions, which would have horrified a well-behaved child. Then the fancy took her to see if a secret spring which closed one of the bureau-drawers had not been changed. She had discovered this secret without her father's knowledge. She tried, then, and to her great joy, the drawer opened. A letter, only one, was found within.

"This letter must be very precious," she said, "for papa to have put it here."

Any other little girl, at this thought, would have closed the drawer ; she, on the contrary, took up the letter ; it was folded double. When she lifted it, the air agitated the leaves, and Bertha read in the corner the signature, VICTOR BELVAL.

"Sophie's father !" she cried. "It is true, then, that my father knows him ; but what have they to say to one

another? Is it much of a secret? I want to know." And she turned the letter in her hand. "Nonsense!" said she, "no one will know!" So reason all those who do wrong: no one will know it, they say. They forget that God sees every thing, and that a bad action is always punished by Him. Bertha opened the letter, and read rapidly, for she feared to be surprised:

"MY DEAR FRIEND: I have to announce to you a very sad and unforeseen circumstance. The failure of the house C— has almost ruined me. My reimbursements this month are heavy; I am on the point of failing in my engagements, and seeing myself branded with the name of bankrupt! Sell, I beg of you, as promptly as possible, the shares which I have confided to you, and send me the proceeds, which will serve to pay the most pressing engagements, while waiting until I can, by sacrificing what remains to me, save the honor of my name! God is my witness that I do not regret wealth for myself, but my heart bleeds at the thought that my only child, my dearly-loved Sophie, may suffer poverty! I wish, at least, to do all in my power to preserve her from it. The house in the Rue Saint-Honoré represents very nearly her mother's dowry. According to the understanding between us, it belongs to you. I send you the deeds of the property, which I confide to you without fear; it will serve as the dowry of your — daughter (the seal had torn away the word which preceded daughter).* But if our projects, in spite of my misfortune—"

Bertha, at this word, heard a noise; she threw the

* —fille, belle fille, daughter-in-law.

letter into the bottom of the drawer, and ran to meet her parents, who were just coming in.

To hide the excitement which agitated her, she feigned a gayety which she did not exactly feel. She was only thinking about the letter. Meanwhile, she experienced at the bottom of her heart a malicious joy; she would be able now to humble Sophie. Her father was about to become bankrupt! That would teach her not to be so proud! 'Twas very well. "And I," continued she, "I shall have a house for my dowry. But why does Mr. Belval trouble himself about my dowry? Ah! it is, no doubt, because he owes money to papa. What a pity that I was not able to read more of it! Never mind, I know enough! My father is a landed proprietor now, and I shall be in my turn! How grand! Shall I not astonish those girls by telling them all this? How I wish to-morrow were come!"

The hope of being able to excite the admiration of her companions so occupied Bertha, that she found the day excessively long, notwithstanding the tender caresses of her father and mother, and the numberless attentions which Andrew bestowed upon her.

At last the hour of departure arrived, and far from complaining and lamenting, as she generally did, she appeared very eager to go. Her parents praised her *good sense*, without suspecting that this good sense concealed a frightful malevolence, and that Bertha was hurrying to quit them, in order to destroy the happiness of an innocent young girl, and the reputation of an honorable merchant.

VIII.

CALUMNY.

WHEN Bertha arrived at school, the pupils were just going up to the dormitory, and she was, to her great regret, forced to keep her confidences for the next day; still she found means to say to two or three of her companions, that she had learned many things which would astonish them.

The next day, at the hour of recreation, she was eager to relate the great changes which her father had made in his apartments; then she told her friends that her parents had recently bought a superb house belonging to Sophie's father. "Papa bought it to oblige poor Mr. Belval," she said, with a pathetic air; "for it appears that the poor man has been very unfortunate! Don't say any thing about it to Sophie; but, you see, she was quite wrong to be so proud!"

"Yes, indeed!" they cried, with one accord; and all were reconciled to the *rich heiress*, who had a house in Paris, and who was to have a chateau with all its belongings.

Very soon a rumor circulated through the school. Sophie's father was ruined, the children said, and they regarded his daughter with affectionate pity. The older pupils, to be sure, scarcely listened to these reports, and, contenting themselves with a shrug of the shoulders, thought no more about it.

But it was not so in the two other classes: the little tongues were exercised in eager rivalry. They repeated all that Bertha had said, they magnified it, and gave proofs of the ruin of Mr. Belval. All these little girls, with airs of great importance, pitied that *poor* Sophie.

Every thing which is out of the common course pleases children, and as they are incapable of judging of the gravity of the circumstances and the depth of a misfortune, it always happens that they prefer unfortunate events to others, simply because they occasion greater confusion. No one of these little girls was really malicious; they all loved Sophie, and there certainly was not one of them who would not have been sorry to see her in tears; and yet they reasoned very coolly in regard to her father's supposed failure, and were, without confessing it to themselves, perfectly enchanted at the new subject offered to their imagination and prattle; and they would have been very much disappointed if some one had come to tell them that the news was false.

As to Sophie, she very soon perceived that the girls were talking of her, and it troubled her. Mr. Belval, who had great confidence in the judgment and discretion of his daughter, had acknowledged to her that his affairs were in a deranged state, and the affectionate girl consoled her father as well as she was able, assuring him that she should not regret his fortune; and she redoubled her zeal for her duties, foreseeing that perhaps her education would very soon become her sole resource. We can easily understand, then,

that being full of this idea, she was very uneasy at the whisperings of her companions, and at the air of compassion with which many of them regarded her.

Many days passed thus, without her having the courage to ask an explanation of her schoolmates, restrained as she was by the diffidence which the thought of a misfortune, actual or anticipated, always produces. Something told her that Bertha was the cause of these whisperings, that underneath all was the tattling of this little girl; but she dared not ask, fearing to seem to mistrust her companions, and thus to attract their attention to the vexation which her father experienced just then in regard to his property, and which she would have wished to remedy even at the price of the tranquillity of her whole life.

But Bertha had not derived from her calumny all the profit which she had hoped; it seemed even that the presumed misfortune of Sophie attached her schoolmates to her still more; and far from seeing her abandoned, she was more than ever surrounded.

The naughty child was in torture. Several times she ventured with some of her friends to murmur the word *bankrupt*, but very softly, and with trembling; for she felt instinctively that it was a great injury to a man, and she feared to be severely reprimanded if the teachers should know it. But the teachers saw nothing of the agitation which reigned among the junior classes. They only knew that the children neglected their studies, and that the lessons went all wrong: the classes were deprived of some recreations, and threatened with a similar deprivation on

the next Sunday, and in this way a little order and application were restored.

Though in the senior class very little was said, Sophie had at last found out that it was a question of her father's failure, and some words which she heard Bertha speak left her no longer any doubt of it. A mortal sadness and disquietude seized her; her companions seemed to endeavor to console her, as if to prepare her for a misfortune which she would learn only too soon. Her suspicions were confirmed every day, and she awaited with the utmost impatience the moment when she should learn with certainty the extent of the calamity.

IX.

THE MISCHIEF WHICH MAY BE CAUSED BY THE PRATING OF LITTLE GIRLS.

THE day for going home at last arrived. All the tongues which had been somewhat restrained by the fear of punishment were now set at liberty, and the children were in the greatest haste, on meeting their parents, to repeat all that they knew of the ruin of Mr. Belval, and of the perpetually increasing prosperity of Mr. David.

Some listened to the news very quietly, and pitied Mr. Belval with all the indifference which people feel for a distant calamity which is reported to them, and of which they know not the victims.

Others paid more attention to it, either because they were jealous of Mr. David, or because they were themselves interested in the solvency of Mr. Belval. Few, very few, had the wisdom to despise these tales, and to send the children back to their toys; and so by evening, all those who had money in Mr. Belval's hands, or some interest in his house, had decided to break with him, not wishing to expose themselves to the chances of bankruptcy. The others waited until they could turn to their own advantage, and to Mr. David's detriment, the news which they had just heard; and when the children returned to school, Mr. Belval and Mr. David were both ruined, the first in his fortune, the second in his reputation.

Sophie had gone home, and she had there learned nothing which could alarm her. In fact, the letter

which Bertha had read had been dated two or three months before. The temporary embarrassment which Mr. Belval had experienced had no ill consequences. Thanks to the assistance of several of his correspondents, he had fulfilled his engagements, and he now occupied himself with repairing his losses, laboriously, but without trouble or anxiety, and without suspecting the storm which muttered around him.

His daughter returned to school, with her mind at rest, and as for two weeks the little girls had only talked of Mr. Belval, they began already to weary of it. Bertha had not gone home, as she visited her parents only once in two months, so she had learned nothing new; the affair died away of itself, and all were occupied with other things.

On the other hand, the exercises for the first communion were about to commence. Bertha, who was nearly twelve years old, was preparing herself for this great action, the most important of one's life. She began to reflect seriously; and without knowing the extent of the frightful mischief which she had done, she recalled with sorrow Sophie's sadness, and reproached herself as for a serious fault. Her confessor also, to whom she acknowledged all, spoke very severely to her in regard to her conduct, and placed before her eyes all the misfortunes which might have resulted from it; for Bertha, ignorant of what was passing, believed that already all was forgotten.

The school, then, had resumed its habitual calm, while terrible events were preparing outside.

People had waited some days before resolving to believe in the ruin of Mr. Belval ; since the most credulous were ashamed to confess that they were impelled to it by mere children's talk. These few days were employed in getting information in regard to his affairs, and, unhappily, this information was not in his favor.

The embarrassment which he had experienced, and which he had concealed from the knowledge of many, was very soon known to all, and the circumstances of it were aggravated. Then it was stated that the house in the Rue Saint-Honoré had ceased to belong to him, that Mr. David was the new owner of it, that Mr. Belval had been forced to sell it, and as he had hitherto appeared much attached to the house, the want of money alone could have induced him to part with it.

But if all were convinced of the ruin of Mr. Belval, no one dared manifest distrust of him, or say any thing to injure a reputation hitherto spotless.

At last, a man whose affairs were already somewhat deranged, fearing to be dragged down in Mr. Belval's ruin, was less scrupulous than others, and went to withdraw the funds with which he had intrusted him. The first start given, the others followed very soon.

Mr. Belval was at first astonished and then pained at the demands of reimbursement which he received every day. But the first who presented themselves were satisfied, which restored a little confidence, and people began to hesitate, and to blame those who had been too hasty, when, on a very large claim being

presented, Mr. Belval desired a slight delay in order to pay it. This was a general signal, and even the most charitable hastened, fearing to arrive too late.

Mr. Belval, not knowing to what to attribute this injurious distrust, requested time to satisfy all demands, and wished to pledge his word; it was refused; it was the first time that an insulting doubt had been cast upon it.

He resolved to do his utmost in order to extricate himself. He called upon the merchants among his friends, to whom he had rendered services. Some complained of the hardness of the times, of the infinite number of failures from which they had suffered; others would not see him—all refused to assist him. Full of anxiety, he repaired to the Bourse (merchants' exchange); the name of bankrupt sounded in his ears. Some words reached him; they spoke of Mr. David, of the house in the Rue Saint-Honoré, which he had bought, and so on.

"It was he," some one said, "who gave the first warning." Mr. Belval doubted what he heard; his confidence in Mr. David was too complete for him to believe in any villainy or meanness on his part. He went to his house to consult him in regard to what he should do, and to beg him to justify himself. Mr. David had left town for some days.

This news fell upon Mr. Belval like a thunderbolt. It seemed to explain all. Mr. David wished to keep for himself the house in the Rue Saint-Honoré, of which Mr. Belval had imprudently confided to him the deeds, and of which he had made to him an

hypothecated sale; and he had revealed the unfortunate state of his client's affairs, which rendered the sale probable.

The despair which his ruin caused, the shame of seeing his name dishonored, the bitterness, above all, of being so cruelly deceived by a man whom he regarded as his friend, all combined to overwhelm Mr. Belval. Too much prostrated to endure so much suffering, he returned to his house, shut himself up in his office, and attempted to take his own life. The attempt injured him fatally, but he did not immediately die. People came running in, and rendered him every possible assistance. When, after a while, he returned to himself, he thought of his poor daughter, and expressed a desire to see her.

Imagine what the unhappy girl must have endured at this frightful news! As she was very pious, her first thought was for her father's soul, and falling upon her knees, she promised to consecrate herself forever to the service of God, if He would deign to prolong her father's life, so as to give him time for repentance and the reception of the last sacraments; then she hastened to his bed of suffering.

As the teacher of the school wished to spare her pupils all violent emotions, and such as were beyond their years, she did not speak to them of what had occurred; so that the children did not know why Sophie had left school. Some time after, they learned that their companion had lost her father; they were told to pray for the repose of his soul, but without being informed of the catastrophe which had hastened his death.

X.

CALUMNY MAKES RAPID PROGRESS.

AT the news of this frightful event, Mr. David returned to Paris. He hastened to Mr. Belval's house; he was not able to see him on account of his suffering condition; but the servant gave him to understand that the rule excluding visitors regarded him particularly.

Mr. David, surprised at this, repaired to the Bourse, the great centre of news and opinion. On his arrival, rapid and significant glances were exchanged among those who knew him, and while looking at him, they spoke in low tones, the subject of these conversations being the *immense* fortune of Mr. David; for the second part of the children's slanders now recurred to the memory: they spoke not only of Mr. Belval's house, but also of the chateau so pompously announced by Bertha. No one knew it, or had seen it; but every one believed in it, or at least pretended to believe in it, and some were not displeased at this opportunity of injuring Mr. David. As one readily imagines, it was not from their children, but from persons worthy of credence, that these calumniators had received these details. Mr. David was accused of profiting by the deranged condition of his client's affairs to purchase considerable estates

from them at a low price, and some even hinted, that this deranged condition was brought on by his means.

Mr. David, astonished at the reception given him, would have spoken to some of his associates, but they seemed to avoid meeting him, and having extended the hand to several of them, he experienced the cruel humiliation of finding it refused. It was too much for him. Hardly able to sustain himself, he ventured to question several persons; they replied coldly, in monosyllables, and left him abruptly. Finally, one of those men who may be called birds of ill-omen, who are always eager to retail bad news, and who find a malignant joy in the sufferings of others, related to him at length all that had happened.

The misfortune of Mr. Belval had suddenly changed all minds; they no longer accused him of imprudence or of bad management, they pitied him; and now all the blame fell back upon Mr. David, who by his indiscretion had caused all the mischief, and who, especially, had profited by his client's want of funds, to purchase of him, at a depreciated rate, a superb house.

At this accusation, Mr. David could not restrain an exclamation of surprise. "What!" said he; "but this house does not belong to me; it is the property of Miss Belval, and it was purchased with her mother's dowry! For several years, it has been understood between Mr. Belval and myself, that my son should marry his daughter, and as his business prevents his taking suitable care of the house, he confided to me the deeds of the property, in order that I might my-

self collect the rents, and make the necessary repairs upon an estate which was one day to belong to my son. How all these private arrangements have become public, I do not know ; for I assure you, on my honor, that I have never spoken of them to any one, and holding a power of attorney from Mr. Belval, I have never had occasion to use the deeds!"

This explanation was too simple to be received without dispute. "But," added the false friend, "your fortune is considerable, they say."

"Considerable!" replied Mr. David ; "the simple tastes and good management of my wife and my own labor are our only riches!"

Mr. David returned to his house, much depressed, and leaving at the Bourse the reputation of an adroit hypocrite. "How he has deceived us all!" they said.

On reaching home, Mr. David called Andrew, and told him all that had happened. As he knew the impetuous character of the young man, he made him promise to challenge no one, however he might hear his father reproached ; and he also forbade him to speak of the matter to his mother, lest he should needlessly pain her ; for he hoped that his innocence would be proved. But what grieved him the most was the thought that Mr. Belval accused him of a want of fidelity.

"If I could only see him," he said despairingly, "I would soon convince him of his injustice, and he would restore to me his confidence and friendship! And who knows? perhaps we might succeed, by dint of care and sacrifices, in preserving his life and re-es-

tablishing his affairs, even were I to employ for that end every thing that I possess."

Andrew offered to go himself to see Mr. Belval. As he seldom went there, they hardly knew him, and there was the more hope that he might be permitted to see the sick man, and Mr. David consented to it.

After some difficulty, as Mr. Belval was a little better, Andrew was introduced. But hardly had the dying man recognized him, than, without listening to his entreaties, or to the explanations which he endeavored to give of his father's conduct, he repulsed him with indignation, calling him the son of a man without honor.

Andrew with difficulty restrained himself, but the state of the invalid and Sophie's presence induced him to control his wounded pride; besides which, he hoped that nothing would thereby be lost.

The two young people had only within a few days learned the projects of their families, and it was, alas! beside a bed of death and under these cruel circumstances that their first interview took place! But neither of them thought of that; much graver thoughts occupied both of them: Sophie was concerned only for the life of her father, and Andrew for the honor of his.

In going out, he made a sign which Sophie understood, and after leaving the chamber, he waited in the parlor, where she joined him in a few moments. Then he begged her to tell him all that she knew in regard to the source of the accusation which weighed upon his father. Sophie had discovered that the

thought of having been so cruelly betrayed by Mr. David was her father's greatest grief, and aggravated the bitterness of his last moments; she then, in her turn, begged Andrew to furnish his father with the means of justifying himself, in order that Mr. Belval, before dying, might, at least, have the consolation of pressing the hand of his friend. The poor young people lost themselves in the labyrinth of their conjectures, and seemed likely to separate without having any thing consoling to announce to their parents. Several times, a thought had come into Sophie's mind, but she repressed it as too odious and destitute of foundation. At last, seeing despair imprinted on Andrew's face, and remembering her father's bitter complaints, she was emboldened to relate to the young man all that had passed at school during the two months previous—not accusing Bertha, but referring all to some imprudent words uttered before her.

Andrew needed no further clue; he knew his sister's talkativeness and indiscretion, which had often pained him; and giving Sophie some hope, he left her, and went to the school. On arriving, he requested to see Bertha in private. The unhappy child turned pale on seeing his altered countenance and agitated air; she felt that he was going to tell her something terrible; and without strength to go on, or to ask a question, she leaned against the wall, waiting for him to speak.

Andrew was too anxious and too much excited to think of using precautions; he at once related to his sister all that had happened, and was about to

question her as to the part which she had had in this frightful history, when poor Bertha, terrified at what she had heard, and full of horror for herself, fell on her knees before her brother, bursting into tears; she told him all that she had done, the fatal consequences of which she never could have foreseen. "God and my father will never pardon me!" she cried, wringing her hands in an agony of despair.

This revelation struck Andrew with astonishment, with grief, with contempt for his sister, and terror at the thought of what her unhappy father would feel. At last, his love for her awakened at the sight of her repentance; he raised her, embraced, and endeavored to calm her, and gradually obtained from her the names of those of her schoolmates to whom she had mentioned the ruin of Sophie's father. There was no longer any doubt about it; they were all the daughters of merchants, of lawyers, and of small bankers. "How," thought he, "can reasonable people believe in the babble of children?" He forgot that interest makes us credulous, and that any advice seems good when it has wealth for its object.

When he saw Bertha a little more quiet, he wished to leave her, in order to arrange some plan for opening the eyes of Mr. Belval; but his sister begged him to take her with him. "I have done the mischief," she said, "and I ought to repair it! I wish to go and see Mr. Belval, to throw myself at his feet, to obtain pardon, and beg him to restore his friendship to my father!"

Andrew approved of this decision, which removed

many difficulties; but unwilling to accept it without reflection, and fearing lest his sister, urged by a sudden impulse, might propose to do more than her strength would permit, told her that the day being nearly gone, he was in haste to return to his father, who was suffering the most cruel anxiety, but that he would return the next day and take her with him, if she were still desirous to go. He begged her to compose herself, to take some rest, and to consult her confessor in regard to what she ought to do and say.

He still hoped that his sister was not the cause of all the harm, and if he did not impart his hopes to her, it was because he wished that this circumstance might at last correct her indiscretions and her curiosity.

He went home to his father, and after having given him some hopes of reconciliation, he again went out to obtain further information. All that he could learn confirmed his fears: the first reports had been really put in circulation by those whose children were at the same school with Bertha.

The next day, he returned to his sister; she was ready to go with him, accompanied by her confessor. Sophie had at length persuaded her father to receive the visit of a priest, and she had naturally sent for Mr. Bernard, the director of the school. He, after having heard Bertha, undertook to tell Mr. Belval the whole story.

XI.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

WHEN Mr. Belval had finished his confession, the worthy minister of Jesus Christ exhorted him to be reconciled to his enemies and to pardon them. At first, the dying man wished to hear nothing about it. The priest then desired him to recite slowly after him the Lord's Prayer—this simple, touching, and most beautiful of all prayers, which has been taught us by God himself. When they came to the words, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," Mr. Bernard repeated them alone to his penitent, and showed him that by these words he condemned himself. "Are not these words," said he, "your strongest motive of hope in the mercy of God? and by what right do you ask a pardon which you refuse to your brethren?"

Mr. Belval listened in silence, and then said with a sigh: "Well, well, father, since it must be—I pardon my enemies—but—except one; for the injury which he has done me is too great, since it falls directly upon my poor Sophie! I loved him as a brother, and he has abused the confidence which I had in him—he has deceived me!"

"Appearances are often deceitful," replied the priest. "How do you know that he is not himself

the victim of a cruel mistake—that he is not also suffering from the blow which has fallen upon you? Therefore I do not ask pardon for him, but justice.”

“Oh! do not say any more about him,” said Mr. Belval, much distressed.

“Why,” replied the priest, “should I not seek to defend an innocent man, whom circumstances seem to accuse? and why should I not endeavor, at this solemn hour, to make you close your life by an act of just reconciliation, in restoring your friendship to Mr. David?”

“Oh! for pity’s sake, do not mention his name!”

“It is the name of a just and honorable man; and therefore it is not for him that I implore your pardon—”

“For whom then?” demanded Mr. Belval, surprised.

“For a poor guilty but repentant child, to whom your pardon alone can restore peace and tranquillity.” And seeing that Mr. Belval, astonished, listened with attention, he related to him all that had happened, the indiscretion which Bertha had committed, and finished by asking pardon for the unhappy child.

Mr. Belval clasped his hands. “O my God! I thank thee!” he cried. The priest then called in Bertha, who came weeping, and knelt at the bedside of the wounded man. Mr. Belval, touched by her grief and sobs, extended his hand to raise her. “My child,” said he kindly, “the fault which you have been guilty of is very serious, no doubt, and it has had fatal results; but I forgive you; may God and

your father pardon you as I do." These simple words were what Bertha most desired to hear; she went away more calm, supported by Andrew, who accompanied her back to the school.

He then returned to his father, and took him to Mr. Belval's house. On the way, he told him that the dying man, undeceived, desired to see him. Mr. David inquired anxiously of his son what news he had heard, and how they had been able to convince Mr. Belval that he was not guilty of so detestable an abuse of confidence. "By and by," said Andrew, "you will know the particulars. Some false reports have caused these misfortunes."

When Mr. David entered the chamber, his friend extended his hand, and pressing his with tenderness, begged his pardon for having doubted him even for one instant. He then recommended his daughter to him. "I shall die contented," said he, "if you will promise me to take care of her." Mr. David assured him that Sophie should become his own daughter. The dying man smiled contentedly; but when Mr. David expressed hopes of his recovery, which he did not share himself, he shook his head sadly. In fact, it seemed that God had prolonged his life, only in order to give him time to restore his esteem to a friend falsely accused. He died during the night.

Mr. David took Sophie home to his wife, and then busied himself in arranging the affairs of his departed friend. He found them in a grievous state, aggravated still more by the fatal catastrophe which had terminated his life; for in the first confusion, no one

had thought of the safe, and a clerk had absconded with a large amount of money, and some valuable papers were missing.

A family council was assembled, to attend to the interests of the poor orphan. Mr. David produced the deeds of the house, and the fatal letter which proved it to be Sophie's property. But the young girl mentioned the vow which she had made, and saying that she would sacrifice all that belonged to her in order to pay her father's debts, requested that so much only should be reserved for her as was necessary for her entrance into a convent. In vain they endeavored to change her resolution; she had promised it to God, and had thereby obtained the salvation of her father. Her friends were obliged to yield to her wishes, and one month later she left Mr. David's house to take the habit of the novice.

The reconciliation of Mr. Belval and Mr. David, the proof of confidence and esteem which the departed had given his friend, in intrusting to his care his daughter and the management of his affairs, excited great surprise. Some believed that Mr. Belval had granted to Mr. David *Christian* forgiveness; others, that the latter had succeeded, by consummate hypocrisy, in persuading his victim of his innocence.

The result was, that at last people discovered the source of all the false reports; some disinterested persons, who had been present when the children repeated Bertha's stories to their parents, related what they knew. Those who had first circulated the reports were ashamed of having believed these children's tales,

and terrified at the misfortunes which they had caused. But the evil was without remedy, and they endeavored to throw the blame upon Mr. David; they said he had at least been extremely imprudent in having spoken of such grave matters before a child. And thus Mr. David learned the part which his daughter had had in this unfortunate affair.

He interrogated Andrew, who acknowledged the truth of the reports in circulation, but concealed from him, of course, his sister's indiscretion, and every thing which was most likely to irritate his father. He extenuated as much as possible Bertha's fault, and Mr. David, wounded, and fearing to know more, easily believed his son; but he resolved not to see his daughter again, at least for a long time; for he felt that her presence would be too painful for him to endure, and that the thought of all the misery which she had caused would expose her to a severity on his part which he might afterward regret. Mrs. David did not dare plead for her, but resolved to see her in secret without speaking of it to her husband, whose noble character she appreciated, and to whose decisions she submitted with entire confidence, knowing that they were for the best.

As to Andrew, he knew his father's severe and just character; but he knew also that his extreme affection for Bertha would soon overcome his resolution; therefore he said nothing at first, awaiting a favorable moment to bring his sister home. But so great was Mr. David's displeasure, that he refused for a long time to send his pardon to the poor child, in reply to

a submissive and repentant letter which she wrote to him, on making her first communion. At last, Mrs. David and Andrew persuaded him to do it, but only on condition that they would say no more about her, and would not go to see her.

The day of the first communion arrived, and while all her companions, happy and blessed, were surrounded by their families, Bertha, broken down by repentance, shame, and suffering, presented herself at the holy table, without any affectionate friend accompanying her; and perhaps the unhappy child, overcome by despair, and feeling herself charged with the blood of her father's friend, might have doubted the mercy of God, and the reality of the pardon which her confessor had called down upon her head, when, raising her eyes, she saw Sophie Belval, in the dress of a Sister of Charity, praying for her. Was it a dream or a reality? She did not know. She knew that Sophie had retired into a convent, and she accepted the sweet vision as sent by God to assure her of his reconciliation.

Meanwhile, Mr. David did not feel that he had acquitted himself toward his friend by the punishment, however severe, inflicted upon his daughter, but resolved to repair as far as possible the evil which she had done. He endeavored to re-establish the credit of Mr. Belval, and in order to satisfy the most clamorous creditors, he was obliged to sacrifice a part of his own fortune; but he thought that he was still young, that his son was industrious, and he counted

no cost in the fulfillment of what he considered a sacred duty.

Some persons praised his devotion; but, unfortunately, they were not those who had any business relations with him, and therefore he was not rewarded by their confidence; others, and the greater number, regarded his sacrifices as the effect of a tardy repentance. Very few chose to see in them a reparation of his daughter's indiscretion, and if this thought occurred to some, they only considered it a piece of folly. But his associates, who were jealous of his prosperity, only found in his sacrifices, arguments against him. They said that he wished to pass himself off as a victim of friendship and paternal honor, in order to reap the fruits afterward. "Moreover," they said, "his sacrifices were but small, and would strengthen his position, and enable him to control unchallenged the immense fortune which he had acquired by illegitimate means, and of which no one would dare demand the source after he had acquired the reputation of a man of integrity and honor."

Such was the talk which circulated in regard to Mr. David, while every body awaited the appearance of this much-boasted fortune, which, alas! he was very far from possessing.

XII.

THE EXPIATION.

MEANWHILE what was poor Bertha doing at school? She was very unhappy, and suffering cruelly for a momentary fault.

The details of Mr. Belval's story and his deplorable end were very much talked of by every body, either through curiosity or listlessness. The manner in which Bertha discovered the secret of the letter remained a mystery except to her brother, her confessor, and herself. Curious people, who were not contented with what was known, invented circumstances for making the story complete; and malice, when once started, finds no stopping-place. It was not only a child's curiosity, they said, which might have been excused, which had led Bertha to open her father's drawer; but it was a shameful cupidity; in fact, it was in trying to rob her parents that she had found this important paper. Then they said that this was not the first time that she had been so base, and that honest servants had sometimes been reproached with thefts which this child had committed. So calumny goes on increasing, and as it passes from mouth to mouth, a slight fault soon becomes a crime.

Those who had never known Bertha as a child, and those who had known her, and had most loudly

applauded her sallies of wit, said with one voice: "I knew it, I could have told you so; this little girl always had something false and wicked in her face, which promised no good, and then she was a liar; and, as the proverb says, any one who will lie will steal."

"If she had been my child," said one, "I should have sent her for some years to the *Madelonnettes*."

"Do you know," said another, "that Mr. David was very much pleased with the resolution taken by Sophie Belval, and that he did not say much to hinder her? He would not have wished his son to marry such a poor girl, for this young man will be very rich."

"Oh! immense wealth! There is a chateau with endless out-buildings—especially if this little girl should happen to die."

"That would be a blessing, after all; it might save her family from dishonor, and, any way, society would be delivered from a monster."

Do you see, my dear readers, how a calumny perpetually grows larger, like a snow-ball? Contrary to the natural law, by which distant objects appear smaller, in the moral order, distance increases them, whether they are good or bad. So the unhappy child was expiating her fault; hardly entered upon life, and in spite of her repentance, she had already lost her reputation.

Those who did not choose to believe in so much perversity in a mere child said it was all false; that it was a clever trick of Mr. David's, who, having had

the imprudence to speak before his family of Mr. Belval's affairs, was glad to be able to throw the blame of his own conduct upon his daughter Bertha, believing that people would easily pardon the talkativeness and inexperience of a child; that all would soon be forgotten, and that he would come out of the affair as white as snow, to enjoy in peace the fruit of his cleverness and the spoils of his victims. For, as we said, Mr. David, the most peace-loving man in the world, was accused of deceiving his clients in a thousand ways, and of entangling their affairs in order to draw therefrom double profit.

Then all voices united to accuse Mrs. David of weakness toward her children. "If she had known how to correct her daughter," they said, "she never would have become such a dangerous little person." At last even good and hard-working Andrew was regarded as a fop and hypocrite.

Such was the talk of the world; at school, too, Bertha had also much to suffer. For as through her little schoolmates, her tales had been circulated and had caused so much harm, so the little girls repeated in school what was said in society. They learned that Mr. Belval was dead, that Bertha's fault was the cause of it, and they made her suffer cruelly for it. "This age is without pity," said La Fontaine, in speaking of children; and he was right. Bertha's little companions, less from a sense of justice than from this necessity of talking and telling the news, which had made them receive without examination the tales of little Miss David, eagerly repeated to each

other all that they knew. Sometimes they tormented Bertha by bitter reproaches, by recalling coldly what she had said of Mr. Belval, and the malice which she had shown toward Sophie; sometimes they overwhelmed her with sarcasms, asking ironically if her chateau was very beautiful, if the buildings were numerous, and if she would not soon take her companions to her country-seat, to enjoy those pleasure-parties to which Sophie Belval, the bankrupt's daughter, was not entitled to be invited.

Those who tormented her the most unmercifully were those who had formerly courted her the most assiduously, because, as we have said, she had for friends and flatterers the most unmanageable pupils in the school, who formerly followed her only to share her sugar-plums and toys, and to be able, in case of necessity, to throw the blame of their faults upon her well-known talkativeness; and all having been frequently wounded by her haughty airs, eagerly seized the opportunity of humbling her. The older pupils treated her with contempt, neither trying to defend her against the malice of the little ones nor casting upon her merited reproaches, for having destroyed the happiness of their favorite companion. And from this contempt she suffered the most keenly.

The unhappy child, repulsed by all, kept herself apart; during her recreations, she walked in a solitary path, watching from a distance her happy school-mates enjoying games suited to their age. She dared not join them, and reflected bitterly on the consequences of her fault. She was cured, I assure you,

and had become as discreet and thoughtful as she had formerly been talkative, flippant, and inquisitive.

If sometimes, one of the older pupils, pitying her sadness and loneliness, joined her, speaking to her kindly, and endeavoring to win her confidence and give her an opportunity of pouring out her sorrow, and thus relieving her poor, aching heart, some mischievous little creature who perceived her would instantly cry out, "Take care of your pockets, take care of your letters!" and poor Bertha would escape from her charitable companion, shedding tears of sincere repentance, in which there was no bitterness against the reproaches of which she was the object, for she felt that she deserved them.

Sometimes the assistant teachers would send her among the young girls who treated her as an outcast, and oblige them to receive her into their company; but Bertha saw immediately the restraint which she imposed, and the distrust which she inspired. The games grew dull, no one wanted her for a partner, no one wished to take her hand in the dances. The poorest part was always kept for her, and even that granted as a great favor, and very soon some pretext was found for ending the game. Bertha would then go away by herself, and beg the teachers not to oblige her to rejoin her companions. She was very unhappy.

She had not seen her parents for many months, and did not know how long her banishment might last. Andrew came to see her occasionally, concealing his visits from his father, who perhaps only pretended to be ignorant of them. Bertha learned through her

brother that her mother was almost dying of grief, and could no longer leave her chamber. She often begged him to take her to her father. "I suffer too much," said the unhappy girl, "and I would much rather die of grief and repentance at his feet, if he refuses to pardon me, than continue this miserable life." Andrew consoled her, telling her that the day of reconciliation would soon arrive, and always finished by begging her to work and study as assiduously as possible.

The David family began to suffer the fatal consequences of Bertha's indiscretion, and Mr. David seeing his wife's sufferings, only felt more irritated against his daughter.

On the other hand, the principal of the school was in an embarrassing position, and she would willingly have had Bertha removed. So long as she had only to defend her against the railleries of her companions, and oblige them to treat her with a little kindness, things went on well enough; but very soon she had to answer the complaints of parents. Some, coming to see her, were *astonished* that she should keep in her school little Miss David, about whom there had been so much talk. Others *begged her in pity* to prevent their daughters from speaking to Bertha, or having any thing to do with her; and some told her plainly that they should take away their children if she persisted in keeping in her school such a dangerous little girl. The world is pitiless. "You understand, my dear madam," said one, "how much harm such a bad example may do. The impressions of infancy are never

effaced, and you ought to fear injuring the dispositions of your other pupils by contact with such a perverse little creature. It is not here in an honorable house, which has the confidence of so many good families, that such a child ought to be placed, but in the house of correction, where she would be treated as she deserves."

In vain the teacher replied that this dangerous and perverse little girl had become one of the best pupils in the school, the most obliging and amiable of companions; that the bad example which she gave was one of perfect submission, angelic sweetness, and persevering application. "If she has done wrong," said the good woman, "she has certainly atoned for it by her repentance; there is not a better child in the world, nor one more docile and discreet. I wish that many of my pupils would take her for a model. Then," added she, "between us, let me say that her fault has rather been one of childish giddiness than of deliberate malice. The circumstances have been greatly aggravated. And which of us has not in childhood committed some faults? I assure you, that the poor little girl has an excellent heart."

"That is very possible," they would reply; "but you must consider whether you prefer to have for a pupil the child of a man of tarnished reputation, whom no one ventures either to visit or receive, or those of honorable and respectable families."

This placed the teacher in a sad dilemma. She loved Bertha, who had become the most gentle and charming girl in the world, and she was unwilling to

offend Mr. David, from whom she had received many kindnesses. But her interest was seriously compromised, and if the threats which were uttered should be carried into effect, she risked seeing her school run down, and thus losing the fruit of many years of toil. Several times she resolved to speak of it to Andrew; but the young man was always so polite, and thanked her so warmly for her kindness to his sister, that she had not the courage to say to him, "Take her away." And besides, what reason could she give for this expulsion, when the young girl was so reasonable and industrious, and only deserved praise? And would not the affair, after all, be very soon forgotten? But circumstances shortly after occurred which relieved her perplexity.

XIII.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF AN INDISCRETION.

MR. DAVID had counted upon his labor and that of his son to re-establish his fortune, which had been greatly shattered by the attention he had been obliged to bestow upon the affairs of his departed friend, and the sacrifices that he had made for the same end ; but he did not count upon the malignity of the world, and he was painfully disappointed to find himself treated coldly in houses where he had formerly been received with open arms. Then he saw the number of his clients steadily diminish ; those who remained wound up their business with him as soon as possible, and then left him, to return no more. He saw that, without exactly doubting his good faith, they did not wish to intrust him with important interests. If they were obliged to consult him, or to confide to him some secrets, they exacted of him pledges so solemn, and promises of discretion so formal and reiterated, that his pride was grievously wounded. He made no attempt to defend himself, hoping that time and his own irreproachable conduct would convince his friends of his integrity, and that they would by and by show themselves as eager as ever to seek his advice and to trust his word. This caused him to be more

severe with his daughter; and though he was often on the point of calling her home, he did violence to his own feelings, and refused to see her; but he willingly allowed Andrew and his wife to visit her.

The first time that Bertha saw her mother, she threw herself into her arms, weeping and begging pardon. Mrs. David knew only half of her daughter's faults, and she wished to know no more. She embraced with tenderness the dear child, whom she had not seen for many months, consoled and quieted her, and bade her hope that her father also would very soon pardon her. Bertha, comforted by this sweet assurance, gave herself up to the delight of seeing her mother. She redoubled her industry, in order to merit in every way the approbation of her father, whom she tenderly loved, in spite of his severity.

Notwithstanding all his efforts, Mr. David was forced to renounce the hope of re-establishing his fortune, and recovering his former prosperity. His office was deserted, and the very efforts which he made to fight against his ill-fortune only served to hasten his ruin.

Unfortunately, Mr. Fratz, whose opinion had great weight in the world, was not at this time in Paris. Hermann had a position with one of the foreign ambassadors, and his uncle had accompanied him abroad. He could not, then, come to Mr. David's aid. If he had not been absent, the esteem which he had for him would have controlled public opinion; and seeing that Mr. Fratz entertained for him the same confidence as before, his other clients would not

so easily have withdrawn theirs. But at a distance, he could be of no service to him. Besides, Mr. Fratz was ignorant of what was passing. After some time, whether in consequence of the change of climate or of the breaking up of old habits, the good old man died, and Hermann did not return to Paris for several years.

Being now in reduced circumstances, Mr. David found himself under the necessity of taking Bertha from school, for he could no longer afford the expense; and thus she saw herself deprived, alas! by her own fault, of the benefit of a complete education.

When Mr. David came to take away his daughter, the principal of the school was very sorry to part with her. For some time, the complaints in regard to Bertha had been less frequent; and she felt now that she might keep without risk a pupil who was an example to the class. Of late, people had talked much less about Mr. David, for every subject of conversation is at last exhausted. Perhaps, also, some began to do him justice. Seeing him ruined, they were forced to yield to evidence, and to agree that he had not this immense fortune of which there had been so much talk. His rivals, no longer jealous of him, began to pity him, and said openly that people had been deceived, and that he might be a very honest man, after all.

As to Bertha, her companions had at last done justice to her good qualities, and they loved her the more in proportion to the suffering which their dis-

trust had caused her, and it was with real sorrow that they learned that she was about to leave the school.

When Bertha saw her father, she was very much agitated, and Mr. David was deeply touched at the sight of his daughter, grown, since he had seen her, so tall and beautiful. The testimonials which he had received of her conduct flattered his pride and touched his heart. He embraced her tenderly, saying, "Let us think no more of the past, my dear child; we have all suffered from it much, and, alas! we shall suffer yet. But your sincere repentance and good conduct have effaced your fault. Your mother is ill, and needs the greatest care; and it is to you, my daughter, that I shall confide the task of relieving her sufferings, while your brother and myself seek the means of support for all of us, for we are now poor, very poor, my dear child! And because I have confidence in your good sense and good heart, I will tell you that you must expect to suffer some privations, which we will all three bear with joy, if we can thereby procure some comforts for our poor invalid." Bertha heard these words with anguish, and accompanied her father home.

It was no longer into the fine, richly-furnished apartments of which she had been so proud that her father conducted her, but into a poor lodging on a fourth floor, where the family lived, with but one servant. They had kept of the old furniture only the most unpretending pieces; in Mrs. David's chamber alone were seen some remains of wealth. They wished to spare her a too sudden change of situation, and

had surrounded her with all those little superfluities which long habit had rendered almost necessary to her. Besides, she could not appreciate the precarious state into which they had fallen. Her husband and son, seeing her end approach, feared to disturb her last moments by the sight of their poverty. They both occupied a little room almost unfurnished and entirely without fire. A little cot-bed in a closet was intended for Bertha, who preferred this arrangement, that she might be nearer her mother, in case she required attendance during the night.

Bertha sent away the servant, pretending that as she had been accustomed to walk frequently in the garden at school, she should certainly become ill if the duties of housekeeping did not replace this healthful exercise. Thus the father and the two children might impose upon themselves any privations, without fearing that they would be reported outside through the indiscretion of a servant. So, while the invalid's dinner was always composed of delicate and nourishing food, suitable to prolong her feeble existence, her husband and children contented themselves with one substantial dish, which was often rendered bitter by anxiety and cruel forebodings.

Mr. David and his son endeavored every day to find some occupation: they received many promises, which were never fulfilled. No doubt, people pitied them; but each one believed that he acted prudently in refusing to lend them assistance, to give them work, or to take as clerk a man who had not known how to manage his own affairs, and who had failed.

As to the son, when he presented himself to obtain some employment, they replied that "he was too young, that he had better wait." Wait! and their resources were becoming exhausted. "Fathers of families," they said, "ought to have a preference over young men." As if he did not also work for his family.

They both returned every evening more sad and discouraged than ever, blaming the injustice and ingratitude of men; for those whom they had formerly obliged pretended not to recognize them.

Bertha rose early, put the house in order, prepared breakfast, and then seating herself by her mother, endeavored to cheer her by reading and singing; for she sang, poor child, with her heart full of tears, while watching her mother's long agony. While thus occupying herself with this cherished mother, she put in order the linen and all the things in the house, but in spite of her zeal and care, and the endeavors of her father and brother, they could not keep misery from the door.

Very soon, in order to live, they were obliged to sell one or another of the articles of luxury which still furnished Mrs. David's chamber. Thanks to the skill with which Bertha concealed their absence, either her mother did not perceive it, or if she suspected, she did not speak of it; but this knowledge, which she kept to herself, from the fear of distressing her husband and children, and the sorrow which resulted from it, aggravated her illness. The more ill she became, the more care she required,

which caused double expense. Mr. David looked forward despairingly to the moment when he should be obliged to refuse his dying wife the assistance which might, if not save her, at least alleviate her sufferings.

At last, Mrs. David became so ill that she hardly noticed what passed around her bed. Then they used their last resources: her chamber was entirely stripped in order to procure for her some alleviation, and her weeping family hardly kept for themselves the merest necessaries. Mr. David, discouraged by so many useless attempts to obtain work, depressed by so many unfulfilled promises, no longer felt the energy necessary for renewing his solicitations, but remained at the bedside of his dying wife, whose last moments he calmed by his presence.

Andrew then went in every direction, begging with tears the work which he could not obtain, and returning only in the evening, worn out and exhausted, to recommence the next day his vain attempts, without suffering himself to be overcome by ceaseless humiliations, or by the ill-will which he encountered at every step.

XIV.

THE MOTHER'S DEATH.

BERTHA resolved to atone, as far as possible, by her devotion, for the harm which she had done ; for she said to herself, and the thought was very bitter to her, that but for her and her fatal curiosity, her parents would yet be rich and honored.

Meanwhile, seeing her mother so ill, she wished to call in a priest. As she was very pious, she would have suffered doubly in seeing her mother die through her fault and without being sustained by the consolations of religion ; for she could not approve of the false reasoning by which relatives often excuse their indifference in regard to the salvation of the souls which are dear to them. She knew well that the visit of a priest, far from hastening death, is often very beneficial to the sick person, by causing him to recover tranquillity and repose of conscience, which also has a happy effect upon the health. But if the soul is about to be called away, the touching cares and consoling words of a priest facilitate the passage from life to death, and the last moments of the Christian are thereby soothed. Besides, it is not necessary to surround this visit with saddening and funereal preparations, and one would shrink less from speaking of it to him who is about to die, if he himself looks upon it as a

source of hope and consolation ; while, by a culpable timidity, persons often expose those most dear to them to the most terrible of all misfortunes—one which we could not wish for a mortal enemy—that of an unprovided death !

These were Bertha's thoughts, as she went then to ask Mr. Bernard to come and see her mother. When he arrived, going into her mother's room, she told her that Mr. Bernard had called to inquire after her health, and requested permission to see her. At this news, a ray of happiness illumined the face of the invalid. Perhaps, feeling death approach, she had wished to see her confessor, but had refrained from speaking of it from the fear of alarming her husband. She was happy that her daughter had given her the opportunity instead of leaving the painful duty to her father. It may often happen that both the invalid and the relatives desire to send for a priest, but the fear of mutually afflicting each other prevents their doing it ; they put it off from day to day, the sickness becomes worse, the hour of death arrives, and then it is too late : the soul appears before God unprepared.

After some moments of conversation, Mr. David went out, leaving his wife alone with the priest. The interview which she had with him appeared to revive her, and for some days she seemed stronger. Her husband and children, forgetting their unhappy circumstances, began to hope ; but she was not deceived as to her state, and regarded as a pure favor the few days yet allotted to her ; she spent them in preparing

her daughter for their approaching separation, and in giving her advice to guide her through life. Bertha, kneeling, listened to the pious counsels of her mother, and laid them up in her heart, promising never to leave her father, and to assist him by her care and tenderness to bear the cruel loss which awaited him. The hope of seeing each other in a better world softened the bitterness of this sorrowful parting. The mother and daughter became more dear to each other than ever. Bertha was only fourteen years old, but suffering had matured her character, and given her more resignation and courage than girls of that age generally possess.

She endeavored to overcome her grief, in order to avoid distressing her mother; but she often left the bedside of the invalid to throw herself upon her knees in the adjoining room, praying to God to spare her mother, and not leave her during her whole life the dreadful remorse of having hastened a parent's death; for she knew that the shock which Mrs. David had suffered, in witnessing the misfortunes of her family, had shortened her life; but God wished to try Bertha still more, and he called her mother to himself.

One day, when Andrew had gone out, Mrs. David, feeling her end approach, asked for the last sacraments, and having received extreme unction, after a short struggle, expired peacefully in the arms of her husband and daughter. Mr. Bernard closed the eyes of the poor mother, and pronounced the last words recommending her soul to God, and then endeavored to console Mr. David. "I thank you for your sympa-

thy," said the unfortunate man gently. "I must endure my life, for my children remain to me, and I have yet duties to fulfill; but," added he, pointing to the inanimate body of his wife, "all my happiness was there. But I am resigned to the will of God."

Father Bernard found Bertha almost in despair. "I," said the unhappy child, "have caused the death of my dear mother!" The good priest knew how much she must suffer, and without recalling the past, endeavored to calm her; but he had much more difficulty than in soothing the sorrow of her father, and giving it a Christian direction; because Mr. David had nothing to reproach himself with, while the consequences of her fault rose up incessantly before Bertha, to overwhelm her with grief.

So it often happens that to the regret which we experience in losing those whom we love is added remorse for the sorrow which we may have caused them, and this aggravates our grief. What would it be, then, if we were obliged to charge ourselves with having hastened their death?

At last, Father Bernard succeeded in calming Bertha, by reminding her that the designs of God are impenetrable, and that if he had permitted her mother's death, it was, no doubt, to spare her further sufferings. He told her that her life belonged now to her father, that she must moderate her grief for his sake; and leading her back to him, he left them together to pour out their sorrow into each other's hearts.

XV.

THE POTTER'S FIELD.

It was night when Andrew returned. What a sad sight presented itself to him! Mr. David, seated near his wife, held one of her cold hands in his; Bertha kneeling beside him, her head supported upon his knee; whilst a blessed candle, which the good priest had placed at the foot of the bed, alone lighted the sorrowful scene. The light, falling upon the face of the dead, gave it the paleness of marble.

At this sight, Andrew seemed turned to stone. His mother was dead! And while she died thus in misery, he was vainly imploring from the pity of strangers a little help to prolong a life for which he would willingly have given his own! His mother was dead! And he had not been there to receive her last sigh and blessing! Perhaps before expiring, her eyes sought in vain the child of her adoption, and she was astonished at his absence. He could not bear the thought; he remained almost as cold and motionless as his mother; not a sigh escaped him, not a word or tear.

Just then steps were heard upon the stairs, and the door opened; two men, city officers, had come to verify the death. At their entrance, Mr. David withdrew from the bedside of his wife, and Bertha uttered

a despairing cry, but Andrew, recovering himself, and fearing that they might touch his mother, forbade their approach, and let fall some words which betrayed the miserable state of the family. The men, though accustomed to similar scenes, were moved at the sight of his despair. Their duty fulfilled, they approached Mr. David and said, "To-morrow at four o'clock, the body will be removed." But as Mr. David neither moved nor answered, and appeared not to comprehend them, one of the men said to Andrew, "To-morrow at four o'clock, the hearse of the poor will come to remove the body to the Potter's Field." At these words, Andrew cried out, "Oh! no, it is impossible! My mother in the Potter's Field! in the hearse of the poor!—my mother!—oh! no, it is impossible! In the name of heaven, gentlemen, listen to me! It can not be!—you would not do it, I am sure!" The men looked at him with an expression of pity. "Poor young man," they said, "he has lost his senses." And they went away, but Andrew followed them out.

To comprehend Andrew's despair, one must know what the Potter's Field is. For those who are buried there, there is no stone, no cross, to show their friends where they sleep. Their children know not where to kneel, when they come to pray for them. After having loved and respected our parents during their life, we can have no greater happiness in the world than to pray for them, and to render to their mortal remains all the cares and honors which are in our power. In a visit to the tomb of a father or mother, there is always a remembrance of their good advice, a

new pledge of fulfilling the promises made to them upon their death-bed, and of living according to the rule which they have given us. The most honorable families, and the most distinguished for their virtues, even in the estimation of the world, are those, we may be sure, in which a reverence for the dead is most religiously observed. A son who respects the memory of his parents will hesitate long before committing a bad action—less perhaps on account of the harm which may result to himself than from the fear of staining the name which is engraved upon his father's tomb. And often a poor girl, pursued by misery and despair, is kept in the path of virtue by the fear of hearing the honored name of her parents pronounced with contempt. These reflections are almost too serious for you, dear readers; let us return to Andrew.

I do not mean to say, in speaking of the Potter's Field, that it is a real misfortune to be placed there. Oh! no; there are so many unfortunate people in the world that a resting-place must be provided for them. In visiting cemeteries, one sees often in the public ground, placed at random, wreaths of immortelles and crosses rudely carved, a touching homage to the memory of those who are no more, and marks of the pious regret of families, often more sincere than those which are exhibited round pompous tombs. But if there are poor more to be pitied than others, even in an equal degree of misery, they are undoubtedly those who have formerly enjoyed a better condition, and whom misfortune has suddenly precipitated into poverty.

Such was the position of the David family. If the

thought of his mother's death had sometimes afflicted Andrew, it certainly had never occurred to him that she would be buried in the Potter's Field. And still proud for his mother when he had lost all hope for himself, he wished at least that if she had died in poverty, she might, after death, have a suitable burial. It seemed to him that he should be less unhappy if he could go to her grave with his sister, to pray for her.

XVI.

SELF-SACRIFICE.

ANDREW returned home late; he was extremely pale, but still he seemed more tranquil; he begged his father and sister to take some rest. Both of them, incapable of resistance, obeyed him mechanically, and he sat up alone all night, watching the remains of his dear mother. God, who listens to the sincere prayer, heard, no doubt, and answered the sighs and prayers of this good son for the repose of a soul so dear to him.

The next day, Andrew went out early, and remained away a part of the morning. On his return, having seen that his father and sister took some nourishment, he resumed his place at his mother's bedside. It was four o'clock, and the hearse of the poor did not come. Mr. David, from whom sorrow had taken away all consciousness of what passed around him, did not remark upon it; but Bertha spoke of it to her brother. "It will be to-morrow," he replied.

Toward evening, he helped his sister in laying out their mother; the two poor children would not have confided this filial duty to any one else. The next day, the door was draped with black, and a hearse of the middle-class, followed by some mourning carriages, stood before the house, while the coffin was exposed

at the door, surrounded by a double row of candles. Then, one after another, some old friends of Mr. David arrived, who had long ago forgotten the way to the poor dwelling. They would have hesitated, perhaps, about accompanying the hearse of the poor; but they would not refuse to pay a last homage to Mrs. David, when their self-love was not likely to suffer by it. That is the way of the world: vanity takes the lead.

Andrew intrusted his sister to the care of an obliging neighbor; then supporting his father, who wished to accompany the body of his wife, he went down-stairs. In spite of his profound grief, he calmly ordered every thing, and seemed less unhappy since his mother had a suitable burial.

The following days, Andrew was out a great deal, and appeared very much occupied. Sometimes, when his father questioned him, he spoke words of consolation, but uttered with so much sadness that poor Mr. David had not courage to make any further inquiries. One day, on coming in, he begged his father and sister to accompany him to a small lodging which he had hired and arranged expressly for them, for he thought it too painful for them to remain in the apartment in which his mother had died; and besides it was too large and too expensive. He conducted them to a smaller apartment, furnished with the greatest simplicity, comprising two rooms and a little kitchen. Mr. David's bed was in one room, that of his daughter in the other. "And you, my son," demanded Mr. David. Andrew pressed his hand.

"Very soon, my dear father, you shall know all," he said. Then taking his sister aside, he gave her some money, telling her that the rent was paid for six months. Then he gave her some advice, as to the manner of treating her father, and caring for him, so as to render his isolated life less trying to him. "But," said Bertha, weeping, "are you going to leave us? and will you not tell us what you are going to do?"

"My dear sister," replied Andrew, "we are too poor to live all together; we must earn our living, each in our own way. But comfort yourself," added he kindly; "this separation will be only temporary. Dry your tears, that you may not alarm my father, and embitter the few moments that I have to remain with you."

Andrew afterward told Mr. David that he had found a little work for him, and he hoped that he would soon have more. It was some copying for a lawyer, a trying and unprofitable task, but it would, at least, procure bread for the father and daughter.

Since her mother's death, Bertha had not gone out except to come to their new lodging, and had spent her time in preparing mourning. To-day, Andrew seeing her work finished, invited her to go out with him. They went to their mother's grave, that Bertha might afterward take her father there. It was a modest grave, covered with a stone surmounted by a cross, and instead of those long, pompous, and ridiculous inscriptions which sometimes provoke a laugh, in a place where all thoughts should be given to re-

collection and prayer, Andrew had had engraved only the words, "*My Mother!*" The children would find it without difficulty, by this simple indication. Bertha knelt and prayed.

When she rose, Andrew took her hand. "It is the last time, at least for a great while, that we shall be able to pray together, my dear sister," said he in a broken voice; "but promise me that when you come here to pray, you will add to the flowers which you bring a similar bouquet for me, that our wishes and prayers may always be united here and in heaven."

Bertha promised; then looking at Andrew, trembling, and with anguish of heart, she said, "My dear brother, you are going far away from us, and in vain you promise to return. I have a sad presentiment that I shall never see you again. O my God! poor, guilty child that I am! how much misery have I caused! Andrew, in the name of heaven and of her who sees us now, tell me that you forgive me all the evil that I have done, and of which you suffer now the cruel punishment."

"How can I help forgiving you, dear child, a fault of which you could not foresee the consequences, and for which you have been so severely punished yourself? Cheer up, dear," continued he, stooping down over his kneeling sister, and tenderly kissing her forehead; "think how strong and courageous you must be, since you alone are charged with the duty of making our poor father's life happy. He will have only you, my Bertha; be his consolation and support; live for him, and speak to him sometimes of your poor,

absent brother, who will never cease to pray for your happiness. But do not weep so, for I have told you, and I promise you, that this separation will not be of long duration, and a day will come when we shall all be happy."

When they returned home, Andrew gave his father some further explanations in regard to the work which he had procured. He had stipulated that his father should work at home, which would be less trying for him, and would enable him to remain with Bertha during a great part of the day.

Meanwhile, his sister prepared their modest repast; she was silent and thoughtful. Mr. David, with tears in his eyes, followed Andrew's movements, and listened to his words, as if this dear son were about to be snatched away from him. The meal was a sad one, and when it was over, Andrew, rising resolutely, said, "I must go," and approaching his father, he knelt, and said in a broken voice, "My dear father, bless your son!" And then Mr. David was made acquainted with Andrew's self-devotion. In order to procure a final resting-place for her who had held to him the place of a mother, to honor the memory of her who had in his infancy tended him upon her knees, and cradled him in her arms as if he had been her own son, Andrew had given up his liberty and become a soldier; and he thought himself happy that if even at the price of his life, he had been able to secure the means of burying his mother! Poor Andrew!

One may imagine what Mr. David felt at this news! At Andrew's words, "My father, bless your son!" he

raised his hands and eyes toward heaven; but in vain his lips endeavored to utter some words; his heart was breaking; his arms fell around the neck of his son, and leaning his head upon his shoulder, his tears began to flow, the first that he had shed since his wife's death—salutary tears, which Andrew saw with joy, knowing how much they must relieve the poor broken heart.

When the hour of departure arrived, Andrew rose, pressed his father's hand, tenderly embraced his sister, and then hurried away. Then he felt that he might think of himself, and weep in his turn for all that he had lost. Hitherto he had restrained himself, for fear of adding to his father's sorrow, and lest his secret should escape him before the time. Now, turning back, he looked again at the house which held all that was dear to him in the world, cast his eyes up to heaven as if seeking his mother's glance, and then crushing back his tears, he went on his way.

XVII.

THE COPYIST.

MR. DAVID, broken by so much physical and moral suffering, had remained since his wife's death in a state of complete prostration, indifferent to whatever passed around him ; but Andrew's devotion restored his courage ; he would have blushed to be less resigned and more depressed than his generous son. So, the day after Andrew's departure, he went to the barrister, received some important work to copy, and returning home, began to write. The torpor caused by grief was now conquered ; he thought of his daughter, and recovered all his energy. And though he sometimes cast a sorrowful look upon the past, he foresaw the possibility of improving his condition by persevering labor. He resolved to satisfy his new patron ; and sometimes when by accident the business of the office was dull, and left him some unemployed time, he called upon several of his old acquaintances, hoping to obtain more lucrative work ; but in this he was completely disappointed. Still, as he wrote a magnificent hand, they gave him some plans to copy and manuscripts to transcribe, which at least prevented his being without work.

But one can judge how assiduous and persevering this toil must have been, in order to procure mere necessities for the father and daughter. Bertha redoubled her care and tenderness, in the hope of making her father's life more cheerful. With what economy she employed the modest sum intrusted to her for their support ! She went herself to market, and very soon learned how to procure what they needed at the smallest possible expense. Every body loved her for her courtesy and modesty ; and every one congratulated Mr. David on having so thoughtful and steady a daughter ; but these praises made her blush rather with shame than pleasure. " Alas !" she thought, " if they only knew how unworthy this poor girl is of all these praises ; if they knew that she had caused the death of a good man and the ruin of her own family, with what horror and contempt they would repel her !"

This cruel thought, which never left her, caused her a grievous sadness, which she concealed from her father, before whom she always appeared with a bright and cheerful face. But this constraint only made her more sad ; and when she saw her father bending all day over his tedious work, hardly venturing to take the time necessary for his slight meals, and looked at his thin, worn features, she felt her heart breaking with grief, and said to herself, " It is through my fault that my poor father suffers so ; but for me, he would be rich and honored, and my poor mother would be still alive ; but for me, Andrew would not have gone, and he would be now, no doubt,

the husband of poor Sophie, who has condemned herself to a life of seclusion. Oh ! I am very guilty !”

Remorse often prevented her from sleeping, and awakened her in the middle of the night. Then, seeing through the chinks of the door a light in her father's chamber, she would say, “Poor father, he is sitting up for me, and I can not help him. I can not, like him, contribute by my labor to the common expenses, because I am so ignorant !”

In fact, we have seen that Bertha profited very little in her childhood by the masters who were provided for her ; and afterward, when, having become more reasonable, through the terrible lesson which she had received, she wished to make up for lost time, she was stopped in the midst of her efforts by her father's failure. Since then, having had no opportunity for study, she had nearly forgotten all that she knew ; for we forget very quickly that which we know only imperfectly.

Mr. David prudently thought of the future ; and wishing to provide his daughter with some resource for the time when he should be no longer living, he resolved to resume her education, and qualify her, at least, to give lessons to young children. Bertha, looking forward with pleasure to the time when she might, in her turn, maintain her father, began to work joyfully ; but, unfortunately, the task which she undertook was not as easy as she had imagined ; she was obliged to go back to the rudiments ; for in order to teach others any thing, we must know it perfectly ourselves ; and in all studies, there is much to learn ;

and with her best efforts, it would be a long time before she would be able to derive any benefit from what she was learning. Then she bitterly lamented her idleness. Her father, seeing her look pale and tired, in consequence of an application to which she was not accustomed, made her rest, and smiled when his heart was sinking; for he saw with sorrow that if his efforts were not entirely useless, at least they were nearly so, and that he would probably be called to leave her before she was able to support herself. So, you see, my little friends, that our most precious years are those of childhood; and upon their employment our future life often depends. You remember the fable of the Two Dogs, which ends with these words: "The only time for learning is in childhood; we learn nothing when we are old."

Bertha was nearly fifteen years old, and she did not know as much as the youngest among you; all her remorse for her past conduct could not bring back one word of what she had forgotten, and she was obliged to learn it all over again. Think what effort and perseverance this required, and how much reason she had to regret the time which she had lost, when she had the opportunity of being well taught. How much sorrow she would have avoided if she had been more attentive to her duties! for idleness is the mother of all vices.

On the other hand, the hours which Mr. David devoted to his daughter's instruction interfered with his work, and he was often obliged to sit up all night, to make up for lost time, that his slender income might

not be diminished. Bertha seeing this, became still more sad. At last, she resolved to find some means of earning money more quickly. She went to one of the neighbors, a very good woman, who was fond of her, and begged her to procure her some work. The neighbor, after a few days, brought her some shirts, which one of her relations had intrusted her with, saying that if her young *protégée* did this work well, she would no doubt be able to furnish her with more.

Bertha was delighted; she ran to hide the work in her chamber, for she would not speak of it to her father until she was sure that she could do it well. The next few days, she rose very early, and began to sew, while her father still slept. Unfortunately, the poor child was not very skilful, and the fear of not doing the work well made her very slow; but, at last, the shirts were finished, and the neighbor took them home.

How Bertha's heart beat while she waited for her return! She feared lest she might not have succeeded. What then was her joy when the neighbor, on returning, gave her some money, and a new package of linen. In receiving this money, the first that she had ever earned, Bertha felt proud and happy; and running to her father, she threw herself into his arms, and told him what she had done. "Now," she cried, joyfully, "you will not work all alone, and I too shall be able to earn a little toward our support!" Mr. David embraced her tenderly, but the pleasure which he experienced was diminished by his regret at seeing his daughter become a simple work-woman.

But she explained to him that it would be very difficult for her to become qualified to teach; that she would also have to lose much time in trying to obtain pupils; and she appeared so happy in being able to earn something, that Mr. David would not spoil her pleasure by making painful reflections on her position, and left her free to pursue her new occupation.

Bertha, now no longer obliged to hide her work, sat all day with her father. Habit very soon rendered her skillful; she worked quickly and well, and her industry increased in proportion to the results of her labor. Her father, fearing lest her health might suffer from too sedentary a life, obliged her every day to take long walks with him, which were very useful to them both. Their position had improved, and they had reason to hope that it might improve still more, but they were reserved for new trials.

Seeing Bertha become so steady and industrious, and observing the remorse which her past faults caused her, let not my readers think her too severely punished by fresh disappointments. God is just, and if He tried her still further, no doubt He judged it necessary for her; perhaps her old defects were only slumbering in her heart, and not entirely corrected; for it requires a long time to uproot bad habits, and prosperity might have awakened them. Then think of the frightful evils which her indiscretion had caused: her mother and Mr. Belval were dead, and poor Sophie was expiating, in the solitude of a convent, a fault in which she had no share; two honorable families were disgraced and ruined. Reflecting on all these

results, you will find her punishment well-deserved, in spite of the good traits which she now manifests.

Moreover, the sequel of this history will show you that imprudence and tattling are terrible scourges at all periods of life, and that often a gossip, with the best intentions in the world, does more harm than a slanderer. But let us not anticipate,

XVIII.

THE WORK-WOMAN.

EASE began now to return to the little family, thanks to the activity of both father and daughter. But Bertha, far from taking more recreation as her father wished, redoubled her industry, and hardly allowed herself the least diversion; for she foresaw the time when she would be obliged to support them both, and she wished to lay by something for the future.

Several times, it had been remarked to Mr. David that his writing was less clear and firm than formerly. His hand began to tremble, and often, when at work, his eyes would fill with tears, as he thought of his past life, and of the humble destiny which awaited his daughter, instead of the brilliant position which he had planned for her. He felt that these remarks were just; his sight, always directed toward the same object, had become enfeebled, and the efforts which he made to hide his suffering only increased the difficulty. Though he never spoke of it to his daughter, she perceived it and was troubled.

A shade of sadness began to cloud their home, in spite of the ease which they enjoyed; for they trembled lest it might soon pass away. They saved as

much as possible from their expenses; but what could they save, having only work for which they were paid so little!

Andrew's letters, though very rare, were always hailed with joy. His position was as happy as possible; his frank and generous temper made him beloved by his comrades, while his excellent education caused him to be distinguished by his superiors. His captain had chosen him for his secretary, which gave him a prospect of more rapid advancement; but the most rapid advancement in military life is slow and tedious; how many years must pass before he would be able to help his sister! It was a great comfort to Mr. David to know that he was appreciated in his regiment as he deserved; and the days on which his letters arrived were festival days to his father and sister.

After some time, Bertha, having become quite skillful, thought that her work would be more remunerative if she could procure it herself instead of receiving it at second-hand. So she went to offer her services to a *lingère** in the neighborhood, who gave her some articles for which she received a higher price than she had obtained from her neighbor. Encouraged by this success, Bertha took great pains to please her employer, and soon had plenty of work. She also obtained employment from some private families who resided in the same house, through the servants. These recommended her to others, and so

* There seems to be no English equivalent for this word.

her customers increased, until she began to work entirely on her own account, without having recourse to the *lingère*, with whom, however, she continued to keep up friendly relations.

One day, she took back a piece of work to one of her customers, and being obliged to wait some minutes, because the servant was occupied, she seated herself upon a bench in the antechamber, placing her little package beside her. At this moment, the mistress of the house, just going out, passed through the antechamber, and observing the superior air of the young work-woman, approached her. "What do you wish, my child?" said she kindly.

Bertha, rising, replied timidly, "I am waiting for Justine, madame."

"And what did you wish of her?"

"I have brought back the handkerchiefs which she gave me to hemstitch."

"Ah! is it you who worked my chemisettes so nicely?"

"Yes, madame."

"You work like a fairy, my child."

She then asked Bertha several questions in regard to her family and mode of living, to all which she replied with candor, but without saying any thing of her father's former position; for she knew that adroit beggars often pass themselves off as victims of ill-fortune, in order to excite pity, when, in truth, nothing but their own misconduct has reduced them to misery. Respectable people generally, when questioned, speak only of the present, without recalling past prosperity,

which may excite surprise, but is not likely to increase the interest of the really charitable.

The lady, however, remarking Bertha's manner and language, suspected what her prudence concealed—that is, that she had not been brought up for her present position, and that poverty, supported with so much dignity and courage, had been caused by some great misfortune. “But, my child,” she replied, “with the education which you appear to have received, why do you not seek some other occupation? This work is not very lucrative, it seems to me.”

Bertha blushed. “I could not possibly do any thing else, madame, and Justine is very good, and pays me well.”

“You must be very industrious; for I know that your prices are moderate.”

At that moment, Justine came in, and hearing the price spoken of, came forward rather uneasily; for to tell the truth, she always added a little to the prices which she paid the work-woman. “I will speak of you to my friends,” continued the lady, “for you deserve to succeed, my dear child. Justine,” added she, turning to the girl with an air which calmed her fears, “I wish you to give this young girl whatever you have to do, and pay her well, for her work pleases me; and sometimes when she comes, I should like to see her. Come into my room some day, my dear child, and show me some of the choicest specimens of your work.”

“You are very good indeed, madame.”

“But the weather to-day is very bad, and you

must have been cold in coming, and perhaps your feet are wet. Justine, take the young girl into your room and let her dry her feet, and give her some luncheon."

"I thank you a thousand times, madame; but I need nothing," replied Bertha, as the lady went out; but Justine led her in, and took care of her, according to the wish expressed by her mistress.

The lady kept her promise: she spoke of Bertha to several persons of her acquaintance with so much warmth and interest, that they all wished to have her work for them; and both Mr. David and his daughter congratulated themselves upon her success.

XIX.

AN OLD GOSSIP.

AMONG Bertha's new customers was the old Baroness de Cervières, a good, obliging, and charitable woman, but excessively talkative. Often the necessity of talking led her to betray secrets which had been confided to her, or to endeavor to find out those which people wished to hide from her; and so it happened to her, as it often does to such persons, that, knowing things only by halves, she reported them incorrectly, and so caused a great deal of trouble, without intending it; in short, she had all the defects which Bertha had had as a child. One can easily see that she made a great deal of mischief. She embroiled families and friends with one another, without knowing it; and when she heard of their quarrels, she was most sincerely sorry, and was far from suspecting that the harm was caused by her insupportable talk. She was often heard to lament the ingratitude of the world, and to complain of being abandoned by her friends. The truth is, she very often had no friends; and in spite of the goodness of her heart, and the excellent advice which she was able to give, people feared to consult her, lest all the circumstances of which they had spoken to her should immediately become the property of the public.

The unfortunate persons who had recourse to her, attracted by her reputation for charity, very soon repented of having secured a protection which was rather injurious than useful to them. Without ostentation, without any vanity on the score of the good which she had done, but merely for the sake of talking, she would repeat to every body what she had learned in regard to their affairs; which, as may be easily seen, was often very prejudicial to the interests of these poor people. Was there an honest father of a family whom she wished to place as cashier with a merchant, immediately every body knew that the poor man was suffering the most cruel embarrassment, that his children were in want of every thing, that, in order to support them, he had been obliged to incur some debts, and so on. At this news, the merchant feared to trust the management of large sums to a man to whom poverty might suggest terrible temptations, and he recalled his promise. Or if a tradesman, somewhat straitened in his affairs, came to borrow a moderate sum of the baroness, very soon every one knew it; and so it happened, as to poor Mr. Belval, that the unfortunate man was ruined.

When the baroness learned these results, she was greatly distressed, never supposing that she was the cause of such misfortunes. The sums which she was able to sacrifice in assisting the father while he waited for another place, or to re-establish the credit of the tradesman, were far from compensating for the injury caused by her ungoverned tongue.

Sometimes also the unfortunate people learned

that the blow which struck them came from the stories of the baroness; and then, as they could not complain, they retired in silence, at the risk of being taxed with ingratitude; preferring to expose themselves to that suspicion rather than to some new indiscretion.

Madame de Cervières was then not very much beloved; and yet, where was there a better heart than hers? She was always ready to empty her purse into the hands of the unhappy, and three quarters of her revenues were distributed to them. But it is not with money alone that the sufferings of the poor can be assuaged; there is another kind of benefit within the reach of all—that is, consoling words, which give the afflicted more comfort than silver, by causing them to hope for a happier future, and encouragement which elevates them in their own eyes, by showing them that their happiness interests some one in the world, and that their sorrows find an echo in a compassionate heart. To distribute money to the poor is only to show a superiority of fortune, which may indeed solace for the time their material wants; but to pity and encourage them is to give them hope and strength of will to help themselves, and so to rise out of their painful position. He only who knows how to listen patiently and with an air of interest, to a recital of the misfortunes of others has a right to call himself really benevolent; he alone fulfills the law of Christian charity. But we must exercise an extreme discretion in regard to the unhappy, in exchange for the confidence which they repose in us, and make them feel that they

pour the secret of their sufferings into the heart of a friend which, like their own, would shrink from exposing to indifferent eyes their wounds and miseries.

Such was not the Baroness de Cervières, who was still in the main an excellent woman, always eager to oblige, always at the disposal of those who needed her. She embraced with ardor every occasion of rendering service to others; neither trouble, nor steps, nor entreaties cost her any thing, and she often went into society only in order to meet some distinguished person, who might be useful to one or another of her *protégées*. And then often her cruel defect stood in her way; for her recommendation was drowned in such a flood of talk, that the person whom she addressed, fatigued by her insupportable chatter, scarcely listened to her words, thinking only how to get rid of her, and hastened, as soon as the baroness had turned away, to forget all that she had said. Sometimes, to the great regret of those who were obliged to use such methods, she was conducted to the door by those who could not waste their precious time in listening to her interminable stories.

Still, when she wished to oblige any one, the baroness was not easily discouraged; she returned to the charge the next day, and then her friends yielded to her importunity that which they would rather have granted to her charity. As to those who had once had recourse to her, they very seldom ventured a second time to solicit her dangerous services. If Madame de Cervières had been able to assist others without talking, or without knowing why they applied to

her, all would have been well. But, unfortunately, she could not do it.

The baroness was friendly to Bertha, and wished to be useful to her. She questioned her minutely; but as Bertha answered with great reserve, and the baroness spoke rather for the pleasure of talking than to hear, and troubled herself little to obtain answers to her questions, nothing occurred amiss. But through her interest, Bertha obtained some work which paid very well, and besides the promise of a little place for her father in one of the government bureaus, which was more than Mr. David had dared to hope for.

XX.

A PERFIDIOUS FRIEND.

ABOUT this time, Bertha was sent by Madame de Cervières to Madame de St. Albin, one of her friends, who had formerly been beautiful, and whose pretensions had increased in proportion as her charms diminished. She was very fond of flattery, and as she had long ago been obliged to dispense with compliments upon her face and figure, the best method of pleasing her was to praise her beyond all measure; she was one of those women to whom flatterers are always welcome, because they have not the sense to discover that their fortune, their dinners, and their parties are all which attract around them so many parasites.

Madame de St. Albin, always eager for any thing which could add to the luxury of her toilet, gladly received the young work-woman, whose embroidery was so fine and delicate, and whose good taste was generally acknowledged. Bertha did the work which was given her very well, and Madame de St. Albin, delighted, took a great fancy to her, though the young work-woman never flattered her; she was polite, attentive, and painstaking, and that was all. Madame de St. Albin found her rather *cold*—that is to say, she did not go into ecstasies over the old coquette, but as

all her work was beautifully done, she easily pardoned this fault. No one, according to her, could be compared to Bertha, and she spoke of her so enthusiastically that she excited the jealousy of a young girl, one of her relations, who had been educated in the same school as Bertha, and whom she had recently taken to live with her, that she might have some one near to flatter her constantly. This young person was very plain, and Madame hoped that this plainness would act as a foil to set off the charms with which nature had gifted herself. Angeline was a cunning and malicious flatterer, and knew how, by a thousand petty tricks, to captivate the good-will of the old lady, upon whom she lavished the most outrageous praises, having in view her fortune, and without her aunt suspecting the trap which her vanity had laid for her.

Angeline had been spending some days in the country; and when, on her return, she learned the progress which the new work-woman had made in the good graces of her aunt, she was furious; for she took offense at every thing. She blamed the maid for having permitted the young girl to acquire a certain ascendancy over the mind of her mistress, and as this girl was as malicious as Angeline, and as there was a sort of tacit understanding between them to keep every one out of the way of Madame de St. Albin, it was agreed between them that all means should be employed to get rid of the new-comer.

The occasion presented itself very soon.

Angeline was too cunning to appear to thwart her aunt's wishes. On the contrary, she praised the beau-

ty of the work and the delicacy of the embroideries which were shown her, and even expressed a desire to take some lessons of the young work-woman.

The next time that Bertha came, Angeline was in her aunt's room, and on recognizing Bertha, she uttered an exclamation of surprise, and instantly her plan was laid. She had always been jealous of Miss David, on account of her beauty and wit. During the last months which they had spent together at school, Angeline had tried to injure her in every way, and when every one else pardoned and forgot her fault, she incessantly recalled it, and treated the poor child as a hypocrite; thus incurring severe reproofs from her teachers, and the reproaches of her companions; so she was delighted with the opportunity of being revenged upon Bertha.

"Oh!" she cried, "is it you, Bertha! Why, aunt, it is one of my dear school-friends. Kiss me, my dear. Is it you, then, who work these beautiful embroideries? They are perfectly charming!"

"You are very good, Miss," said Bertha, responding coldly to the exaggerated caresses of her former schoolmate. Perhaps she was ashamed of being recognized under the simple dress of a work-woman, she who was formerly so vain, or perhaps she did not like Angeline, and did not care to meet her.

"Miss!" replied Angeline; "dear me! how ceremonious you have grown, my dear! Aunt, tell her not to be so shy."

"An old acquaintance! That is charming, to be sure," replied Madame de St. Albin, rather coldly, for

she was not particularly pleased that her niece should claim a work-woman for her friend. "Come, child," said she to Bertha, "don't be so timid; you need not be afraid of my niece; she is kind, and may be of use to you."

Bertha blushed. "I thank you, Angeline, for your kind intentions," she said, coldly.

"That is well," said the aunt. "I will leave you together, to talk over your secrets, and we will see how we can be of use to you."

"My father expects me, madame," replied Bertha, "and if I am absent long, he will be anxious."

"Really, my dear, you are *very* cold! You are just like Sophie Belval. Do you remember her?"

The poor child turned pale at this spiteful insinuation, stammered some excuses to the aunt and niece for quitting them immediately, and hastened to leave a house where a profound malice concealed itself under the appearance of friendship.

When she had closed the door, Angeline seated herself with a pensive air, resting her head upon her hands.

"What is the matter, Angeline?" asked her aunt.

"Nothing, aunt," she replied hypocritically, pretending to wipe away a tear.

"But you are crying! Is it because this little fool does not understand the honor which you do her, in choosing to remember her? You are too good to trouble yourself about such a person, who, after all, can never be one of your associates."

"O aunt! a school-friend, almost a sister!"

"There you go with your grand words—a sister, a friend! These sentimental phrases are well enough when one is only twelve years old; but once having left school and gone into society, you ought to forget such childishness; and, between us, it is very well that no one has witnessed this pathetic scene; for I should not feel particularly flattered to hear my niece call an unfortunate little work-woman her friend. In future, Angeline, I wish you would spare me such scenes."

"I will obey you, aunt," said Angeline, sighing.

"Very good; and that you may not make such a mistake again, I will not give this child any more work; you must learn to keep your place."

Angeline concealed a smile of satisfaction; she knew her aunt's pride, and she had succeeded beyond her hopes in ruffling it. She flattered herself that she had got rid of Bertha, though she knew very well that if her aunt's coquetry should at some future day give her a motive for so doing, she would forget her anger in order to utilize Bertha's talents. She therefore replied, sighing artfully, "It is rather for her than for myself that I am grieved at your prohibition, which I shall submit to certainly; but I assure you that Bertha is of a very good family."

"Of course!" replied Madame de St. Albin, bursting into a laugh; "perhaps she is some dethroned princess."

"No, but her father was formerly very rich."

"I dare say; to excite pity, these beggars always have some story of that sort to tell."

"But this is very true, my dear aunt; it seems that

Mr. David sacrificed himself by paying the debts of a friend."

"Why, it is quite a romance," said her aunt. "Tell me all about it, it will amuse me," she added, childishly curling herself up in her easy-chair, and preparing to listen; for she was as fond of listening as Madame de Cérvières was of talking.

"Well, why don't you begin? what's the matter?"

"Oh! nothing, dear aunt," replied Angeline, in a soft tone; "I was only thinking how lovely you look."

"Flatterer!" said the old coquette, simpering and caressing the hand of Angeline, who had seated herself on a low tabouret at her feet. "Come, now for this story."

"But, aunt, I know very little about it. Mr. David was in business, they said; I don't know what he did, but he was intrusted with very important secrets. Well, one day, it happened that one of these secrets was divulged; the merchant whom it concerned was reduced to bankruptcy, he was seized with despair—and—he killed himself."

"Frightful!" exclaimed Madame de St. Albin; "and did this infamous lawyer betray his confidence?"

"Oh! no, aunt, for he was considered the most prudent and honorable man in the world, and no one would have dared accuse him of such a crime, though just about that time he bought at a very low price a house and, I believe, a chateau which had belonged to this unfortunate merchant."

"People were very indulgent, I am sure. Whom,

then, did they accuse of having committed the indiscretion?"

"Dear me, aunt, they did not know exactly; they only had suspicions."

"But of whom, pray? Speak!"

"O aunt! you are already so prejudiced against my poor Bertha, that I dare not say any thing."

"What! was it she?"

"O aunt! I did not say it was she; but some person supposed—"

"How did this child know her father's affairs? He must have been guilty of great imprudence at least, to have spoken of such things before a little girl."

"If it was an imprudence, he has punished himself well for it, aunt; for he has sacrificed his entire fortune to pay the merchant's debts, and to re-establish his credit; people even said that he wished his son to marry the daughter of the man who killed himself, but she refused him, and has retired into a convent."

"Charming!" cried Madame de St. Albin, clapping her hands. "Why, it is a complete novel; nothing is wanting: catastrophe, calumny, a marriage broken off, incomprehensible devotion! Dear me, how amusing it is! But what I don't understand is what this little girl has to do with it all. If there was no indiscretion on the father's part, there must have been some traitor who maliciously carried away the papers and letters to have them read."

"No, aunt; they said—but that is so frightful that I assure you I never believed a word of it; and at

school, no one ever thought of accusing Bertha of it."

"Of what?—you speak in enigmas."

"They said—but, indeed, I dare not tell you, aunt—they said that she had rummaged her father's bureau and his papers, and had found out the whole story."

"But what interest could she take in it at her age? Did you not say that she was only ten or eleven years old?"

"Yes, aunt; but it was her habit; she was very talkative and inquisitive."

"And through curiosity, she opened her father's drawers!"

"Yes, aunt; at least, I prefer to believe that rather than any thing else."

"What else would you believe, then? I am sure that is bad enough."

"Well, some of the girls were astonished that she had always so much money, although her father was very rich—"

"The child is a monster! You mean to say that she robbed her father? Charming beginnings! After all, it does not surprise me, for I always thought she had a mean expression."

"O aunt!"

"And you pity her! and you have dared call such a creature your friend! At any rate, I thank you for having opened my eyes. One of these days, with my foolish confidence, I should have been imposed upon by this miserable little thief!"

"Thief! aunt, that is too hard a word."

"But it is very well merited, and I promise you that the next time she comes, I shall have her put out of the house without further ceremony."

"But, aunt, I beg of you—"

"Don't beg of me for her, Angeline! I do not comprehend you! What great interest can you have in this infamous creature? You carry pity a little too far! Is this my reward for all my goodness to you? This affection is very low-bred!"

"My dear aunt, don't speak to me so; you know how much I love you, and if I wished to defend Bertha, it was through pure kindness; but I will not think of her any more, for I could not endure your displeasure even for five minutes."

"Very well, that's right! Poor child, I see your good heart has carried you too far. But cheer up; these emotions are not good for me either; it is a great misfortune to have such a sensitive heart! I am going to the ball this evening, and I am afraid I shall look fatigued. Let us go out a little while; it will revive me."

And so this *very sensitive* woman received without examination a string of slanders and idle tales, which deprived a poor work-woman of her reputation, and took from her the means of earning her bread!

A few days after, Bertha returned. Madame de St. Albin owed her some money, which she needed; for, according to the custom of frivolous and coquettish women, this lady did not scruple to make those who worked for her wait for the money which they had

earned. When the servant announced the work-woman, Madame de St. Albin cried sharply :

“What! that young girl is there! and you have left her alone! How imprudent you are! I dare say the key is in the closet of the antechamber!”

The servant cast a triumphant glance at Angeline, who, with eyes cast down, smiled maliciously.

“Go,” continued Madame de St. Albin, “take this money to the girl, and tell her that I shall have no further need of her services.”

All this had been said so loud that Bertha, who was in the antechamber, separated from the boudoir only by the parlor, had not lost a word of it. When she comprehended that her honesty was doubted, she sank trembling into a chair. “What can Angeline have said of me?” she asked herself, just ready to faint. “This is another consequence of my fatal indiscretion! I am justly punished, but what will become of my father, if I can no longer work for him?”

XXI.

THE TONGUE OF A GOSSIP FREQUENTLY DOES MORE MISCHIEF THAN THAT OF A SLANDERER.

ONE can imagine the state of mind in which Bertha returned home. Her father, noticing her agitation, asked its cause, to which she only replied that she had been annoyed in regard to her work, and that perhaps she had been wrong to feel it so much. Mr. David was somewhat relieved by this explanation, and he returned to his desk, and his daughter to her embroidery. But Bertha's heart was heavy, and her eyes every moment filled with tears, so that she could hardly go on with her work. "What can Angeline have said to her aunt?" she asked herself. "I have been indiscreet and talkative, but I have never robbed any one; and they distrust me, and are afraid to leave me alone with the keys in the closet! It is a cruel punishment! But, O my God! I implore thee that my father may never know it!" Then new fears began to disturb her: would Angeline's stories rest with her aunt? Would she not repeat them to her friends? and would she be received in other houses, after having been banished from that of Madame de St. Albin?

These painful reflections occupied her the whole day. Her father, seeing her pensive and thoughtful, vainly endeavored to distract her. In spite of all her

efforts to hide her distress and to appear tranquil, he saw that she was concealing from him some secret trouble; but full of confidence in her, he attributed her sadness either to ill-health or weariness. Bertha gently assured him that she was well, and that she enjoyed her quiet life in his society, and only prayed that it might continue. Mr. David resumed his tedious work, expecting that time would reveal the cause of his daughter's trouble.

After some days, Bertha went to see Madame de Cervières; her heart beat as she went: how would she be received? This lady had manifested great affection for her, and the thought that she might have listened to Angeline's stories caused her real pain. But she was reassured by the gracious manner in which she was received by the baroness. After having talked with her a long time, and ordered several articles, this lady, having examined a magnificent piece of embroidery which Bertha had brought, said, "That is too beautiful for me, my child; I am neither young nor pretty enough to wear such things; I advise you to take this pelerine to Madame de St. Albin—it will become her much better than myself."

Bertha blushed. "I do not work any longer for Madame de St. Albin, madame," she stammered.

The baroness started. "And why not, my child? Has she not paid you?"

"Oh! yes, madame."

'Then I suppose she has appeared to you, as she always is, capricious, unreasonable, and quick-tempered. My dear child, I do not blame you for wishing

to maintain your dignity—a just pride is pardonable; but I should blame you for being too susceptible; that would be a great mistake, my child, for we must bear the faults of those whose assistance we require.”

“I assure you, madame,” replied Bertha, “that I have never had reason to complain of Madame de St. Albin; she has always been very good to me, and—”

“Then I do not comprehend you; why will you go there no more?”

“Because she said that she should have no further need of me,” replied Bertha, hardly able to command herself.

“Oh! la! that is nothing,” said the good lady; “either you did not understand what she said, or else it was a mere caprice, of which, I dare say, she repents already; she will be very glad that you have braved her displeasure, when she sees the beautiful pelerine which you have to show her.”

“Indeed, I dare not,” replied Bertha, with tears in her eyes.

“Then there is something else which I ought to know.”

“I beg of you, madame,” cried the poor child, “not to speak of this to Madame de St. Albin. Perhaps she has found a more skillful work-woman.”

“That is very improbable; but you are a singular girl. If I did not know you very well, I should think you were concealing something from me. But let us say no more about it.”

Bertha went away full of anxiety. She knew the baroness well enough to be sure that she would not

give up discovering the cause of her expulsion from the house of Madame de St. Albin; and if the latter, through forgetfulness or indifference, omitted to mention it, the curiosity of the baroness would easily find it out. And she was right: Bertha had hardly gone, when the baroness hurried to Madame de St. Albin to learn the secret of what she called her caprice. And we must say that she took this step less through curiosity than from a charitable desire to restore to her *protégée* one of her best customers.

Madame de St. Albin was so thoughtless and frivolous that she never examined her own conduct very critically; she was not malicious; she missed Bertha, and really pitied her in the bottom of her heart, and had no idea of the injury that she was likely to do her. She related to Madame de Cervières all that her niece had said, without trying to aggravate or extenuate Bertha's faults, and simply to answer the inquiries of the baroness. Madame de Cervières was very sorry to hear all these circumstances—not that she believed a word of the story; on the contrary, she regarded it as pure calumny; she was too good to believe evil of any one, without positive proof; but she saw how much these stories might injure Bertha. She did not like Angeline, and, without accusing her of calumny, she charged her with tattling, and blamed Madame de St. Albin for receiving so readily a mere girl's tale; and finally she begged her to restore her custom to Bertha, as the best method of putting a stop to these reports. Then, as a further inducement, she spoke of the beautiful pelerine, which Bertha had not dared

offer to her, and which she had taken to another lady of their circle.

Now, unfortunately, it happened that this lady was precisely one of those young and pretty women of whom Madame de St. Albin was jealous, and whom she considered as her *rivals*. She colored at this news, and seemed much irritated, and Madame de Cervières seeing that she had said too much, endeavored to repair her error; but it was too late; Madame de St. Albin would not recall her decision, and did not wish to hear any thing more about Bertha. The discussion became rather warm, and the two ladies would have parted in anger, if Madame de Cervières had not known how to maintain throughout the utmost coolness and the most exquisite politeness. Besides, Madame de St. Albin was afraid of any lively emotion, which, by awakening her sensibility, might ruffle her countenance and injure her beauty.

Madame de Cervières returned home, furious at the insensibility and selfishness of the old coquette, and resolved to uphold Bertha to the utmost; and, for a beginning, she spoke of her to every person whom she met during the day, thus doing her, unconsciously, an irreparable injury. The next day, she sent for Bertha, and that she might not rest under the weight of so grave an accusation without knowing it, and thus being able to combat it, she told her every thing that Madame de St. Albin had said, adding, to console her, "You know, my dear child, that I do not believe what this old coquette says, and that it has not diminished my esteem and affection for you."

She might have talked on a long time, for Bertha was incapable of interrupting her. She had expected to be accused of curiosity and imprudence; but of robbing her father!—that was too much, she could hardly endure it, and was just ready to faint, when her old friend, making her sit by her, said affectionately, “Come, dear child, take courage; this is an infamous accusation, I know, but we shall be able to meet it.”

“Infamous indeed, madame,” cried Bertha, bursting into tears; “to rob my father! You surely do not believe it, madame; I never could have committed such a crime!”

“I know it, dear child.”

“I have been curious, talkative, indiscreet, and wicked even; but to steal—”

“That is it; I supposed there was some childish indiscretion under it all; but if you have formerly been talkative, you have entirely corrected yourself; for you are certainly the most reserved and discreet little person of my acquaintance. You have corrected yourself, and you have done well. There is nothing that I detest so much as a gossip; I can not endure these people who go round inquiring into that which does not concern them, and retailing right and left what they have learned. Besides, they are very dangerous people; their tongues cause a deal of mischief. Oh! I detest gossips!” And the good baroness, without perceiving it, thus pronounced her own condemnation. Bertha wept, and let her talk.

At last, Madame de Cervières succeeded in consoling her somewhat, and the young girl, touched by her

kindness and indulgence, related to her a part of the misfortunes which had befallen her family, and of which she was the cause; while, during the recital, Madame several times exclaimed sympathetically, "Poor child! poor child!"

"You have been severely punished, my child," she said at last; "but God is just, and we must submit to His decrees. But **you** are perfectly cured, I will testify that to all the world, and I will not suffer you to be tormented any longer for a defect which you have perfectly corrected." She then told her what she intended to do for her. "And we shall see," she concluded, "if we can not combat the stupid obstinacy of Madame de St. Albin and Miss Angeline's malice."

Bertha thanked her a thousand times for her kind intentions, but she knew too well the harm that is done by talking, not to fear it, even under the garb of charity. She thought, too, that if Madame de Cervières related to her friends all that had happened, she would encounter some listeners as ill-intentioned as Angeline, who would think only of her fault, without taking into account the efforts which she had made to correct it. She then gently endeavored to explain to Madame de Cervières that in her position, silence and complete forgetfulness would suit her best. "That is it," cried the old lady, almost vexed, "to say nothing, and so confirm these malicious talkers, by letting it be supposed that they have spoken the truth. No, no, the calumny must be unvailed in broad daylight. And then, my dear child—do not feel hurt that I should say so—you are not rich, you are obliged to

work. Now, you remember the proverb: '*Help yourself, and Heaven will help you.*' You can not help yourself alone; some one must help you to obtain work and to combat these wicked tongues, which your good conduct will silence. Now, I will be this friend, if you will allow me," she added, smiling.

Bertha embraced her; for a moment, all her fears vanished, and if she was pained to think that her father's sad history, already forgotten, would be brought out again, she hoped that the protection of the baroness would cause her faults to be forgiven. "Perhaps," she said, "people, at last, will think that I deserve some pity. Perhaps it will procure for my father some occupation more lucrative, less fatiguing, and more in accordance with his talents." And as hope is natural to young people, she began already to dream of a happier future for her father and herself. And Andrew, her good and generous brother, would obtain a more rapid promotion, a fitting reward of his filial piety!

With these pleasant thoughts, she quitted the old baroness. But after she had returned home, she was again beset by her former fears, which troubled her the more, as she could not speak of them to Mr. David. She remembered the coldness with which her father had been repelled by his old friends, at a time when his recent services ought to have plead in his favor. Now, that years had passed, would they manifest any more feeling? As for those who did not know him, she hoped for nothing from them, even with the support of the baroness. The poor child did

not know that, in misfortune, we must not count on those who call themselves our friends; for, very often, we receive the most efficacious assistance from those to whom we have hitherto been strangers.

But what Bertha most feared was the selfishness which rules society. "The baroness deceives herself," she said; "if some charitable souls are moved at the story of our sufferings, all will unite to blame my past conduct; very few will believe me changed and repentant; and if, unfortunately, Angeline's base accusation is known, it will find echoes, in spite of all the efforts of Madame de Cervières, and I shall be ruined! Oh! I should have preferred quiet and forgetfulness; and notwithstanding the kindness of the baroness, I foresee that all this will cause me many vexations."

We shall see that her fears were only too well-founded.

XXII.

CONTINUATION OF THE PRECEDING.

LA FONTAINE has justly said, "A wise enemy is less to be feared than an indiscreet friend."

In fact, it was not the tattling of Madame de St. Albin and Angeline which did Bertha the most injury.

Madame de St. Albin related, indeed, to many of her friends the story of the young work-woman, as she had received it from her niece; but people paid little attention to her talk. The frivolity of her character was so well known, that every one supposed she had not understood, or had forgotten what she undertook to relate, and all blamed her for repeating a story which was probably false, at the risk of ruining the prospects of a poor young girl.

As to Angeline, her ill-nature was so well known, that every one accused her of jealousy, and that was all. Some were disposed to take a great fancy to Bertha, simply because Angeline spoke ill of her. The injury which she intended to do to Miss David recoiled upon herself, and she was despised as her base conduct merited.

Madame de St. Albin's friends, placing little confidence in her stories, continued their custom to Bertha; if some pretended to be credulous, it was only in

order to please Madame de St. Albin; and as she had already forgotten Bertha at the end of a week, having supplied her place with another work-woman equally skillful, they very soon ceased to speak of her in Madame de St. Albin's circle.

Unhappily, it was not so in that of Madame de Cervières. The good lady had resolved to do all in her power to procure work for Bertha, and to assist her in every way. And she did so in her own peculiar style—that is to say, she talked of her to every one indiscriminately, and for the pleasure of having an interesting story to relate. If she had merely spoken of the affair to such persons as were in a position to be useful to Bertha and her father, and if these had not chosen to render assistance, that would have been the end of it; or if she had repeated the facts exactly as she had received them from Bertha, without adding those which Angeline's malignity had invented, people would have blamed Bertha, but she would have been pitied and excused, because she had now acquired that modesty and reserve which become a young girl. But, unhappily, the baroness mentioned particularly Angeline's accusations, in order to deny them, and related the whole so rapidly, that all the circumstances were confused and mixed up, and as generally happens in such cases, her listeners remembered, of all this talk, only that which was disadvantageous to Bertha, and forgot whatever was in her favor.

At first, people paid little attention to what Madame de Cervières said; her talk tired them out, and

they scarcely listened to it. "This good baroness," they said, "will some day be the victim of her kind heart. I do not know what she has been telling us about a young work-woman falsely accused of robbing her parents; it is a calumny, she says, and yet a part of it is true, for it seems the child, who is very inquisitive and mischievous, read her father's papers; and now the baroness comes to recommend the girl to us. Poor baroness!"

But it was not so with all: fools and malicious people attended to the stories of Madame de Cervières, because they found therein an occasion for scandal which was too good to be lost; and very soon the distorted history of Bertha was in circulation everywhere, while people said, "The necessity of talking and of being busy makes this poor baroness take under her protection people of doubtful honesty."

Madame de Cervières, who did not hear the current reports, astonished at her want of success, redoubled her efforts—that is to say, her chattering; she stunned every body with her talk. Those who did not wish to listen, and those who would have given Bertha work, merely through compassion, were at last so tired of hearing about her that they dismissed her, in order to be rid of the subject. From all which we learn that it is not enough to wish to do good, but we must know how to do it.

The unfortunate story was never forgotten, but was perpetually amplified; in each new version, Bertha's faults became more enormous, and every one

believed in them—some through prudence, as they called it, and others because they did not choose to take the trouble of informing themselves.

Very soon, all Bertha's customers gave her up. At first, she attributed this misfortune to Angeline's wicked tongue; but one day, a selfish, unfeeling woman, in giving her the amount of a small bill, said, "After what Madame de Cervières has said to me in regard to you, I do not wish you to work for me any longer. I pity you, to have, at your age, such a doubtful reputation!" Bertha was struck as if by a thunderbolt. What she had hitherto endeavored to conceal from herself was then perfectly true: Madame de Cervières, with her kind heart and her endless talk, had injured her more than Angeline, with her malice! Madame de Cervières, whom she loved and venerated was the cause of these new trials! "O fatal defect!" she cried, "which turns even the best actions into poison!"

It was always to Madame de Cervières that people referred whatever was said against Bertha, even that which was most false; and the charitable woman would have been much astonished had she known all that passed current under her name; but it was she who first spoke of these things, and who still spoke of them. Bertha was obliged to suffer in silence this new kind of punishment; of course, she could not speak of it to Madame de Cervières; and when Madame, in the goodness of her heart, lamented her fruitless endeavors to serve her, Bertha herself, with eyes full of tears, consoled her by saying that she still

had the assistance of the *lingère* who had first given her work.

In fact, she returned to her, and the good woman, delighted to see Bertha again, so gentle and industrious, and to observe how much she had improved, gave her work, which did not pay so well to be sure, but at least the young girl might hope that calumny would not come to snatch it from her.

XXIII.

A DUEL.

ANDREW from time to time wrote to his father, and his letters always spoke of the goodness of his superiors, and of their kindness toward him. As he was very attentive to his duties, he had never incurred the slightest punishment, and every thing seemed to promise him a happy future.

These hopes filled Mr. David's heart with joy, but even while he congratulated himself upon his present happiness, a most frightful and unforeseen catastrophe was hanging over him.

One day, Andrew was in a café with several of his companions; some young officers entered, and among them one who had recently lost a distant relative, who left him a considerable fortune; the event had been spoken of in the town. The young officer, a wild fellow, had enlisted without the permission of his parents; after having squandered his patrimony, having nothing to expect from his family, he seemed destined to pass his life as a soldier, and without hope of promotion, for his irregular conduct had brought upon him frequent reproofs. The eccentricity of a cousin whom he hardly knew, and who disinherited near relations for his sake, came to his relief.

Any other person, perhaps, surprised at this unexpected favor, would have taken this opportunity to reform his life, and enjoy worthily the good which God had bestowed upon him. Not so this young man, who saw only a new opportunity of displaying himself, and who formed the most extravagant projects for the employment of his new fortune. To enjoy it at his ease, he must wait until his time was up and his resignation accepted. He consoled himself, meanwhile, by spending as much money as possible, and in showing himself more insolent and extravagant than ever. The affair of the succession required either his presence in Paris, or at least the placing of his interests in safe hands. This care occupied him, and they were speaking of it, when the officers entered the saloon where Andrew was.

"Why, then," said one of them, "do you not apply to some well-known lawyer whose honesty—"

The officer burst into a laugh. "Where did you come from, my dear fellow! The honesty of a lawyer! That is a virtue little known among these men; in general, they are leeches who fasten upon rich men to suck the best and choicest of their property, and enrich themselves at their expense."

"But not all," said his interlocutor; "there are some whose reputation is so well established—"

"That their hypocrisy and trickery are only the more dangerous. Do you know the history of that unfortunate Belval?"

At this name, Andrew, seated at a distance, was

painfully startled, and in spite of himself, he listened to the remainder of the conversation.

"Belval," continued the officer, "was a distinguished and respected merchant; he had placed a part of his fortune and had confided his dearest interests in the hands of one of these intriguers, who profited by a momentary embarrassment in the position of the merchant to appropriate his property. Then he circulated the most absurd reports in regard to Mr. Belval; in short, the unhappy man, ruined and dishonored by one whom he thought his friend, killed himself. And this lawyer, who passed for an honest man, was only a clever rogue. His name was David—"

Andrew sprang up. "Sir," cried he, trembling with pain and anger, "you lie!"

At this sudden interruption, the silence of death reigned in the café. The officer, flushed with anger, turned slowly round, and insolently measured Andrew from head to foot.

"Who are you, who dare speak to me in this way?"

"Who am I?" cried the unfortunate young man, "I am Mr. David's son."

"And I," replied the officer, contemptuously, "am Mr. Belval's nephew."

At this double announcement, the bystanders comprehended that they would vainly attempt to bring the two young men to mutual apologies. The lie given by Andrew and the insult to his father had been too public to be forgotten or pardoned; a duel

was imminent ; for, according to the fantastic laws of honor, the officer, in order to prove his assertion true, must risk his own life, and endeavor to take that of his adversary ; and Andrew, in order to prove his father an honest man, must commit a frightful crime, forbidden alike by religion, by humanity, and by the law.

This fatal principle is so respected, that those who were most attached to the two adversaries, who in any other circumstances would have done any thing to spare them the least pain, did not hesitate to declare that they must fight, that one or the other of them must die ; because they could not endure in their ranks two dishonored men. Perhaps even they would not have been satisfied with the mutual excuses which the two adversaries might have made, if they had been disposed ; but they were too excited against each other to think of such a thing.

The officer was furious at having been given the lie so publicly, especially when he believed he spoke the truth, and Andrew was in despair at hearing his father's name insulted.

The duel was then resolved upon, but secretly ; for it was necessary, above all, to elude the observation of their superiors, who would have prevented it. The fact of the officer being of a superior grade to Andrew increased the difficulties ; for only the esteem which he entertained for the character of young David made him consent to fight with him ; and this caused Andrew to be doubly exposed.

The evening previous to the meeting, Andrew

wrote to his father, begging his pardon for having so disposed of his life, and without mentioning the cause, he gave him to understand that it was an affair of honor so serious that a duel was inevitable, unless he were willing to be branded as a coward and obliged to leave his regiment. Then he wrote a long letter to his sister, full of excellent advice, and of solicitude for his poor father, whose only comfort she would soon be; he recommended patience under the trials and vicissitudes which yet awaited her, and closed with the most tender wishes for her happiness. He wrote the more affectionately, lest she should suspect herself to be the cause of what was about to happen. He knew that in acknowledging the real motive of the duel, he should only awaken her remorse; so he passed as rapidly as possible over all that, praising her present conduct, and closing with the most tender farewell.

These letters finished, Andrew put his affairs in order, and then, falling upon his knees, implored the pardon of God. He thought of his good mother. How she would suffer if she saw her adopted son thus expose his life, and, above all, risk his salvation! But he could not recede without being called a coward; "and then," said he, "would she blame me for defending my father's honor?"

Day began to break, and Andrew went out. He traversed the silent town, and went into the country. The Angelus bell rang from a little village church, not far from the place of meeting. The joyous sound, announcing the awakening of nature, and calling the

children of God to prayer, the balmy morning air, the song of the birds, all this calm happiness moved his soul. "O God!" he cried, with involuntary terror, "and must I leave all this, or else live with my conscience burdened with a frightful crime? Victor or vanquished, my fate is equally horrible! my former tranquillity forever gone!" Then he cursed the vain and unjust laws of honor, which allow no accommodation, even when all is satisfactorily explained. For Andrew's frank and simple explanation had cleared his father in the eyes of his friends, and all the young men, on his assertion, did not hesitate to acknowledge Mr. David as an upright man; even the young officer declared that what Andrew said might be perfectly true; and yet neither would be the first to propose a reconciliation.

Andrew's mind was painfully agitated. The skill of his adversary was well known; he had always either killed or grievously wounded his man. But though at twenty-three years, a young man may well cling to life, the fear of losing his was what troubled Andrew the least. But the sorrow which his father would experience, if he should fall, unnerved him; and his poor sister, who would, perhaps, soon be an orphan, in the midst of the dangers and difficulties which beset a portionless girl, would be without support, and would vainly call her brother to her help! Then the good advice of his worthy mother returned to his mind; his faith taught him that he was about to commit a crime, and ruin his soul—his faith, which awakened, more lively than ever, at the sound

of the morning bell. And yet Andrew went on and on, urged by the code of honor; the word coward sounded in his ears, and stifled the voice of conscience.

Having arrived before the modest church, he hesitated a moment, then went in and fell upon his knees. "My God!" he cried, "who seest the bottom of my soul, pardon me!"

He remained some time kneeling, tears rolling down his cheeks without his being conscious of it. Just then, the curé entered to say mass. He perceived the young man, and observing the grief which his countenance indicated, approached him to offer consolation. "Courage, my son," said he gently. "The providence of God often sends us severe trials; but He who consoles us," added he, pointing to the crucifix, "teaches us to bear them, and as long as we are docile to the voice of conscience, He inclines toward us, to sustain us, and to give us the strength necessary to bear our cross." Andrew buried his head in his hands; for a moment he felt tempted to confess all to the priest; but would not this avowal seem a weakness, timidity, and cowardice? He sighed deeply, and said within himself, "O my God! grant that in this fatal encounter I may be the victim, and not the executioner." And yet the love of life was strong in his soul; it seemed to him frightful to die at his age. He turned toward the old priest, and taking his hand with sadness and resignation, said, "Thank you, father, for your good advice; but there are circumstances in which a strange fatality urges

and drives us into wrong-doing in spite of ourselves."

"There are no circumstances in life," replied the minister of God, in a severe tone, "in which we are obliged to act contrary to our conscience."

Then he added more gently, seeing that the church was rapidly filling, "Believe me, my son, follow always the voice of conscience, this faithful counselor which God has given us in order that we may come off victorious in all contests with the enemy of our salvation. I am about to offer the holy sacrifice; and when it is over, if you wish to open your heart, if you need advice and a friend, come to me; God will give me such words as will comfort you."

Andrew started. "After mass!" said he; "yes, I will speak to you." Then he added, hesitating, "But if, instead of coming, I send for you to come to me, promise me to come."

"Merciful Father!" cried the priest, startled by a sudden misgiving.

At this moment, the altar-boy came to tell him that it was past the hour.

"Remain here!" said he authoritatively; then he withdrew.

Andrew fell submissively upon his knees; but at that moment, the clock struck five: it was the hour of rendezvous. He sprang up as by an electric shock; and when, arrived at the altar, the priest turned round to bless the people, he saw with terror that the place which the young man had occupied was vacant.

What were his emotions during the holy sacrifice!

A duel was about taking place, he could not doubt it; and while he prayed to the God of peace, two beings, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, two brothers were going to murder each other! Never had the worthy priest prayed with so much fervor, and yet often his thoughts quitted the altar to follow the young man whom he wished to save; and he prayed God, in the name of the divine blood shed for man, not to suffer a crime to be committed.

After mass, hardly had he laid the sacred vestments in the sacristy, when the good priest heard a hasty step crossing the church; it seemed to him that he recognized the clank of spurs upon the flags of the church; his heart beat violently. Already he thanked God; but his joy was of short duration. A stranger approached, and begged him to come to the assistance of a dying man, and with a deep groan, he followed the soldier.

XXIV.

A LETTER.

It was a delicious morning in April; the sky was clear and blue; the sun shed golden rays on the smoky roofs of Paris, lately covered with snow, as if to invite to joy and happiness those who had suffered during the winter. The poor of Paris feel keenly the rigor of the frosts; but they are the first to enjoy the fine days and the bright rays of the sun.

On this day, Bertha's little chamber had an air of gayety. She sang, as she watered the little garden arranged upon her window-sill, and the twittering of the birds replied to her joyous strains. Light-hearted, as girls are at her age, she had forgotten, at least for the moment, all her past sufferings and her anxieties for the future; she was enjoying this beautiful morning with delight. Her tranquillity had returned with the first swallow and the first lovely day, and Angeline's malice and Madame de Cervières' talkativeness all were effaced from her memory. Besides, the evening before, the *lingère* had told her that she had to prepare several grand wedding outfits; it was work which would pay very well, and last for a long time, and Bertha thought with joy that the time would soon

come when she alone could earn enough, and let her father rest.

For some time, Mr. David's sight had been so enfeebled that he could hardly accomplish his work. Often, while writing, his eyes became dim, and a cloud seemed to hide all objects from him, so that he was obliged to stop short. He concealed his suffering from his daughter as much as possible; but she, who watched lovingly all his movements, easily saw it, and longed for the time when she would be able to say to him, "Rest, for I am now able to work for both of us." This moment had arrived, and it was that, more than the return of spring, which filled her heart with joy.

Feeling so, every thing looked bright to her; nature seemed to sympathize in her happiness, and she watched with delight a charming little rose-bush which she had tended all winter, and which now rewarded her care by a half-opened bud of the sweetest perfume. Stooping over it, she inhaled its fragrance, exclaiming, "How sweet it is! My God, I thank thee! What a lovely morning, and what a joy it is to live!"

A sigh attracted her attention, and turning, she saw her father at her side. She embraced him, saying, "Oh! my dear father, how happy I am! See, my flowers are half opened, and the sky is so pure and blue! I do not want any thing in the world!"

He tenderly returned her embrace. "May God, my child," said he in a tremulous voice, "preserve to you this sweet tranquillity, since it suffices for your

happiness!" And, in spite of himself, his heart sank, agitated by a sad presentiment.

We are wrong to murmur when misfortunes befall us; for it is often the moment when our affairs seem most desperate that Providence chooses to heap His favors upon us. And very often, also, it happens that when every thing smiles upon us, and the greatest calm reigns around, we are menaced with the most frightful blow, because it is unforeseen. Mr. David knew this by experience; experience, which disenchanting us, and destroys all illusions, made him tremble, and in spite of himself, Bertha's joy depressed him. She perceived it, and attributed his preoccupation to pecuniary anxieties; but not wishing to speak of her new work until she was quite sure of having it, she drew him smilingly toward the table set for breakfast, and gayly invited him to do honor to their modest repast. Mr. David did not wish to sadden his daughter; he seated himself, smiling, and very soon Bertha's contagious gaiety overcame him, his face brightened, and frank bursts of laughter resounded through the little room.

Suddenly the bell rang. "Oh!" cried Bertha, rising, "if it were a letter from Andrew! that is all we want to-day! I bet it is one, and I'll go and see." And she ran to open the door.

"Twelve cents," said the portress.

"Here it is," cried she, full of joy; and searching in the pocket of her apron, she drew forth the money, which she gave to the woman, and went bounding back to her father.

"It is a letter from Andrew, my dear brother!" Then she suddenly turned pale, her limbs trembled, and she sank into a chair, her eyes fixed upon the letter; it was not Andrew's handwriting!

"What is the matter, my child?" demanded Mr. David with terror. Bertha gave him the letter in silence; a bitter cry escaped him when he saw the black seal. Two papers fell out of the envelope; they were directed, "To my father." "To my sister." In announcing Andrew's death, an officer, one of his friends, had thus fulfilled his last wishes, and sent to his unfortunate family the touching lines found in his chamber. Bertha fell upon her knees without voice or color. Mr. David took the paper which was addressed to him, and read in a broken voice the tender farewell of his unhappy son. His eyes were fixed, dry and burning; his chest heaved. Suddenly his sight became clouded; he passed his hand several times over his eyes, as if to wipe away the tears which, no doubt, veiled from his sight the dearly-loved characters; then with a sorrowful sigh, returned the letter to his daughter. "Read, my child," said he; "read it—I can not!" Bertha took the letter and read it, sobbing; but when it was finished, and Mr. David extended his trembling hand again for the paper, he could not find it. Then his daughter, with anguish, threw herself into his arms; she comprehended the cruel truth: her father was blind!

XXV.

A POOR BLIND MAN.

THE unfortunate pair remained together a long time, mingling their tears and sobs ; but the excess of sorrow seemed to have redoubled Bertha's strength and courage ; she first recovered her calmness, and seating herself by her father, and tenderly pressing his hand, she lavished upon him all the consolation, in her power, speaking to him of the mercy of God, who would without doubt come to their help. Finally, she said, the evil was not desperate ; it might be only a temporary blindness, and it was necessary, first of all, to call in a skillful surgeon, who might, perhaps, be able to restore the sight. She begged her father to be patient and resigned, while she went out to seek assistance.

She sighed as she passed the still open windows. The day was far advanced, but the sun shone brightly, the sky was blue, and on the little rose-bush, the half-open bud of the morning had become a full-blown rose, in all the splendor of its beauty. A bird warbled, beating its wings, on the edge of the roof ; but the young girl, who, a few hours before, replied to his song, gay and light-hearted, now passed silently

by, casting upon this overflowing joy of nature, eyes dimmed by tears. She was no longer a timid child, trusting confidently in the future, and protected by cherished friends, but she was an orphan, the only comfort and support of a blind father.

When the surgeon arrived, Bertha watched anxiously all his movements, and the least contraction of his features, to discover there some signs of hope or fear; but he pronounced the word *amaurosis*, and all hope vanished.

Amaurosis, my children, is a terrible affection, which falls suddenly upon the sight, without any one being able to foresee it or prevent it. The eyes appear sound and healthy; but their sight is gone, and no power in the world can restore it; the malady is incurable. At this sad announcement, Mr. David fell into despair, and Bertha was obliged to go and find Father Bernard, and ask him to come and console her unhappy father.

The voice of religion gradually calmed his grief but the blow which he had received was so violent that he fell dangerously ill. Then Bertha displayed all the virtues which sorrow had developed in her soul. She showed how much courage and strength resignation can give, even to the most feeble. Without entirely abandoning her work, which was more necessary to her than ever, she exerted herself to the utmost, in order to give her father the attention which his sad position required; and when discouraged, she fell upon her knees, imploring God to protect and sustain her.

Sometimes, when she thought of the sorrow which her brother would have felt in learning his father's condition, she thanked Providence for having taken him out of this world of trial, and believed that God, in His mercy, had pardoned him; for she had the consolation of hearing that a priest had assisted him in his last hour, and she hoped that he and her mother watched over her, from their happier home.

Still, with all her activity, her work did not suffice for the endless expenses which her father's illness required; she was obliged to sell many articles in order to procure the requisite medicines, and she was glad that Mr. David's blindness prevented his seeing the spoiling of their little apartment. She always replied calmly to his inquiries, without manifesting any disturbance, and so deceived him in regard to their means, exaggerating the product of her work, which was so much interrupted that it had become worth very little. And, moreover, Mr. David's condition was so much worse, that the fear of losing him was added to Bertha's other anxieties. The unhappy girl implored of God to preserve to her the only friend whom she had upon earth.

Very soon all her resources were exhausted. The *lingère* had been obliged, in spite of her affection for and interest in Miss David, to find another workwoman to prepare the wedding outfits, because Bertha was not able to work as diligently as others. She ate only bread, and denied herself articles of real necessity; but, notwithstanding all her voluntary privations, she saw with dread the moment approach when she

would no longer be able to provide the requisite medicines for her father, and fulfill the orders of the physician. The doctor soon discovered her situation; several times he came to her aid, without her knowing it; but at last he ventured to suggest the *hospital*.

Bertha clasped her hands, and looking at him despairingly, as if to implore him not to take her father from her, burst into tears. "Do not be so distressed," said the physician; "this suggestion should not alarm you, and I have made it, because I consider it the only means of speedily restoring your father's health. In the hospital, he would receive all the care which his condition requires, and which you can not give him. And you, having more time for your work, would be able to put your affairs in order, to receive him again on his recovery, and procure for him the comforts which he needs." But Bertha only wept, and repeated mournfully, "My father in the hospital! Oh! no, never!"

"Calm yourself," replied the physician, "and confide in me. I promise you that your father shall not be confounded with the other patients, and that he shall receive all those particular attentions to which his rank, his education, and his misfortunes entitle him."

At this moment, Father Bernard entered. He frequently visited his unfortunate friends, in order to strengthen and encourage them both. The doctor acquainted him with the cause of Bertha's tears, and Father Bernard undertook to reconcile her to the new sacrifice required of her; and when the physician had gone, seating himself by her, he advised her to resign

herself to the will of God. The worthy man, more accustomed to visit the garrets of the poor than the drawing-rooms of the rich, knew how, by consoling words, to find his way to the heart. The young girl was docile and pious, and when Father Bernard reminded her that the Son of God had chosen to come into the world poor and despised, and to be born for us in a stable; that, in making himself the most humble of men, He wished to show himself to us as the King and Father of the poor and afflicted, Bertha's pride, which had revolted at the word hospital, and which had made her repel the doctor's proposal, abated by degrees. She accepted with submission this new trial which God had sent upon her, and which would cause her to resemble the more her divine Master. Extending her hand to the good priest, she said, "May the will of God be done! My father must now be reconciled to it; and may the Lord give him strength and resignation! I must confide to you, Father Bernard, this difficult task; and if by your pious counsels you persuade him to accept the sacrifice required of him, I shall always bless you!"

Father Bernard pressed the poor girl's hand, and entered the sick man's chamber. At the first words which he spoke, Mr. David bowed his head. During his long sufferings, he had learned to bear, for God's sake, all the crosses which were sent upon him. Still, this new and unexpected trial required all his courage. He reflected a few moments, and then clasping his hands, replied in the beautiful words of Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken

away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Then turning to Father Bernard, he said in a trembling voice, "But my daughter, my dearly loved Bertha, what will become of her, alone in the world?"

"Console yourself," replied Father Bernard, "I have thought of your daughter. The worthy woman who gives her work will receive her and keep her with her while you continue ill. It is a safe and pious home, where she will be treated with affection, and where neither good examples nor good advice will be wanting to her. Give yourself no anxiety, for until your return, your daughter will want nothing. Besides, she will go often to see you, and will tell you herself how she is; and she will be able to work, to save a little, for the time when you will return to her."

"Yes," said Mr. David sadly; "and when I return, I shall be a charge to the poor child; I shall eat the bread which she will have earned with difficulty; her health will be injured by prolonged watching, and the best years of her youth will be spent in nursing an infirm old man!"

"And can there be for a young girl a sweeter or more precious occupation than taking care of a parent? Can she better employ her labor and earnings? Besides, God is great and His mercy is infinite; and the more unfortunate we are, the more reason we have to hope in Him. With this faith, my friend, one is never utterly unhappy."

"Oh! I hope and believe in Him," replied Mr. David earnestly, "and I constantly pray Him to protect my Bertha, who will soon be poor and alone in the

world, surrounded by dangers and seductions ; for I feel, my friend, that my hour is come ; God is calling me to Him ; but my child ! my poor, dear child !" and two burning tears fell from his sightless eyes.

"No," said Father Bernard, pressing his hand, "you will not die yet ; your daughter needs you, and God will protect you both ; but if He calls you from this world, believe that He will not abandon her. Is he not the Father of the orphan, the God of the poor and the weak ? And I promise you that I will watch over her, and will assist and protect her to the utmost of my power. But let us speak no more of that ; let us think of your affairs. It would be better for you, my friend, to be removed to a place where you would receive all necessary care—to the hospital, in short. Do not be distressed at this, my friend ; is it not the house of God, of our common Father ? The care which you will receive there will hasten your cure, and you will be treated, you may be sure, with the utmost consideration ; and for your daughter's sake, you should consent to it ; for perhaps her strength may not equal her courage." At these words, Mr. David raised himself with difficulty upon his couch, and said firmly, "I am ready !"

The good priest then went away, to procure Mr. David's admission to the hospital. It was readily granted, and he obtained also the unlooked-for favor that the invalid should be placed, not in the common hall, but in a little room alone, which would enable Bertha more easily to pass the day with him. Father Bernard returned with joy to bring this good news,

and he caused his afflicted friends to see in this the goodness of God, who thus softened for them the bitterness of that word, so dreaded by the unfortunate, the hospital !

He conducted Mr. David to his new home, and the same evening, Bertha went to sleep under the hospitable roof of the good *lingère*.

XXVI.

THE SISTER OF CHARITY.

WHEN Mr. David arrived at the hospital, the care which he received was so tender and affectionate that Bertha hoped for a speedy recovery. She was glad that they had both had the courage to submit to the temporary separation, and warmly thanked Father Bernard for having persuaded them to it. Feeling less anxious in regard to the dear invalid, she returned to put in order the little apartment which she had left, hoping that she would soon be able to return there again with her father.

When Bertha had gone, Father Bernard remained some moments with his friend, and then sent for the sister to whom the care of the invalid had been confided, and whom he strongly recommended; then he also retired.

The sister approached the bed to bestow some care and assistance upon the patient; and when she spoke, her voice startled Mr. David, while she was apparently much moved in seeing him. In her simple devotion, she had not thought of inquiring the name of the patient intrusted to her care; she only thought that it was a suffering brother whom God had sent to her. But on seeing him, she was troubled, and endeavored

to recognize in this face wasted by pain and suffering, and in these sightless eyes, features familiar to her.

"Ah!" thought she with anguish, "can it be he? so unfortunate! Surely it is not possible!" But she could not doubt it; in this poor, suffering being, who had now no other refuge than the hospital, no support but public charity, she recognized Mr. David, formerly so rich, happy, and envied. And though her eyes were accustomed to sights of sorrow, a tear fell from them upon the dry and burning hand of the sick man. Mr. David sought the hand of the young sister, and felt it tremble in his. "Thank you, sister," he said, "for your sympathy and tenderness! I felt one of your precious tears fall upon my hand, and yet you know not the extent of my misfortunes! You see only my physical sufferings, and you can not know how my heart is tortured with grief, in thinking of my daughter, my poor, dear Bertha, who will soon be an orphan!"

The sister involuntarily started. Mr. David raised himself upon his couch, and leaned toward her, seeming to forget that he was blind, as if he wished to examine her features. He then added in a trembling voice, "Your name, sister, be so good as to tell me your name. I wish to know it that I may constantly recommend you to God, in the long night of prayer which He has given me."

Miss Belval, for it was she, of course hesitated a moment, and then replied in a gentle voice, "I am called Sister Sophie of the Redemption."

"Sophie!" said Mr. David, falling back upon his

pillow ; " Sophie ! O my God !" Then he remained absorbed for a moment, repeating this well-known name, without taking any notice of that of " the Redemption," which Sophie had added to her own, that she might be constantly reminded that she owed to God all her thoughts, for the redemption of her father's soul.

After a moment of silence, Mr. David resumed ; " You have the voice and the name of one to whom I have caused great sorrow, for whom I grieve every day, and who——" He stopped ; his paternal love had warned him of his approaching death, and his heart, constantly occupied with the thought of his daughter, made him seek protectors for her in all who surrounded him. But he feared, by an untimely confidence, to diminish the interest which he sought for his child. He had intended to recommend Bertha to the sister who should take care of him ; he suspected that this sister was Sophie Belval ; and though he did not doubt that Sophie, if it were she, would be generous enough to pardon his daughter, he would not risk an avowal which might injure her in the eyes of a stranger.

The reader may perhaps be surprised that Mr. David did not know that Sophie was in the hospital ; but that is easily explained : when Miss Belval took the veil, she was at first destined for the education of children ; afterward she asked of her superiors that she might be attached to the service of the hospitals, and as her health was good, her request was granted. About this time occurred all the disasters which be-

fell the David family; then, Mr. David, feeling that his presence would only be painful to Sophie, had ceased to visit her; he was consequently ignorant that she was devoted to the sick, or he had only a vague impression of it.

The young sister, perceiving that her presence agitated Mr. David, endeavored to calm him by soothing words, promising that she would do all in her power for his daughter; that she could do nothing by herself, but that she would recommend her to her superiors, in whom she would find wise and kind friends, who would never fail her. Then she begged him not to retard his recovery by anxiety and agitation; for in the state in which he then was, the least excitement might be fatal.

To please his young nurse, he became quiet, and pretended to sleep, but tumultuous thoughts pressed upon his brain, and all the events of his life came crowding upon his memory. One by one his sad days passed before him; regret for the past, the vivid recollection of the cruel losses which he had suffered, and anxiety in regard to his daughter's fate, increased his fever.

Sophie, standing near his bed, silently contemplated the unfortunate blind man, seeking with terror to imagine by what series of circumstances he had fallen into such misery. She remembered Andrew, his frank and loyal character, and noble heart, and wondered how he could have suffered his father to go to the hospital: he must have been very unfortunate himself—for her fears went no further.

The next morning, Sophie was with the sick man when Bertha arrived. The latter, seeing the young sister, uttered a cry of surprise, and ran to her father as if to seek a refuge against the recollections of the past, the reproaches of her own conscience, and Sophie's resentment. But Sophie's expression was so gentle, her look rested with so much pleasure on this beautiful young girl, whom she had last seen only a child, that had Bertha been less agitated, she would have noticed her affectionate smile, and, above all, the signs which she made her to control her feelings, lest she should disturb her father.

But at her voice, Mr. David suddenly raised himself, and drawing his daughter toward him, asked in a tremulous tone, "It is she, is it not, my child? it is our poor, dear victim. Ah! I recognized her. She is accomplishing to the end her generous devotion, and not content with forgiving, she comes to comfort those who have made her suffer!" But Bertha hardly heard him; bursting into tears, she threw herself into her father's arms, imploring pity and pardon.

"Oh! yes, pity her," replied Mr. David, clasping his hands, and turning toward Sophie. "You, who are an angel of goodness, pardon those who have injured you so much! Pardon my poor child, for she has suffered! Ah! Sophie, you have been avenged! But pardon her, and I shall die contented."

"Pardon!" said Sophie, in a gentle voice, "why! what have I to pardon? That which God has done is well done, and He has permitted whatever has happened, in order to lead us all through a period of trial

to endless happiness. Bertha could not advance nor foresee my father's ruin; she has only been a feeble instrument in the hand of Providence. Let us submit to His designs, without murmuring at their severity, or trying to penetrate them. For myself, I am happy here; I owe to the misfortunes which have befallen me the knowledge of the only true happiness in this world: entire submission to the will of God, and devotion to the sufferings of our fellow-creatures. I have nothing to pardon, Bertha. I bless God every day."

The poor blind man raised Sophie's hand to his lips, thanking God for the consolation afforded him in his last hours; then turning to her, he said, "Sophie, you promised me yesterday to be a sister to my poor daughter!—a sister!—alas! there was a time!—but God has not willed it!"

At these words, Sophie started, and her eyes fell upon Bertha's black dress. The young girl understood her look, and extending her hand toward her father, said sorrowfully, "He is all whom I have in the world!" Miss Belval raised her eyes toward the crucifix which hung over the head of the bed, and repeated in a low voice a prayer for the departed.

XXVII.

HERMANN.

THE emotion which Mr. David had experienced had reduced his strength, and his situation became more alarming. In vain the tender cares of the young sister, the devotion of his daughter, and assistance of every kind were lavished upon him ; his end approached, life was retreating from this body, exhausted more by moral suffering than by sickness. Bertha alone refused to believe in the new misfortune which was about to overtake her. She passed her nights in prayer, imploring God to restore her father. Then when, in the morning, she returned to the hospital, and found at the bedside of the dying man the pious daughter of St. Vincent, so devoted and generous, who with touching self-abnegation forgot her own sorrows to think only of those of others, she asked herself what right she had to obtain the life of her father, and why she should be more privileged than the poor girl to whom nothing more remained in this world. Then she bowed her head with resignation, saying, " My God, may Thy will be done ; but happen what may, my place is here."

After a time, the tranquillity which Mr. David en-

joyed seemed to have somewhat restored his strength ; but he felt that it was only a temporary improvement, and, as it were, a last effort of expiring nature in a man too young as yet to die ; and far from anticipating recovery, he hastened to improve the moments granted him in giving his daughter salutary advice. Bertha and the young sister listened with filial respect, and Mr. David, who had made the offering of his life, and who awaited death without trouble or anxiety, thanked God for having given him these two cherished daughters, to close his eyes.

Every day, Bertha came to the hospital ; and every day, as she came, a gentleman followed her, without her perceiving it : it was Hermann. We have seen that good Mr. Fratz died in Germany, and his nephew, who inherited his property, inherited also his virtues and his charity. Within a year, he had returned to France, where he employed his fortune worthily ; the unfortunate had the greater part of it, as during Mr. Fratz's life. On arriving, Hermann had heard Mr. David's story, the outrageous reports which had ruined his reputation, and the part which Bertha had had in the misfortunes of her parents. Of course, these stories reached him distorted and exaggerated, but his good sense and good heart enabled him easily to unravel the truth from the mass of calumnies in which it was enveloped.

Hermann wished to renew his acquaintance with Mr. David, in order to offer him friendship, consolation, and, if need be, assistance, but he could not find him. The world easily forgets the unfortunate ; and

as Mr. David had gradually withdrawn himself from his old friends, who manifested for him neither interest nor attachment, no one was acquainted with his new residence, and Hermann hoped that he was not so completely ruined as people supposed, and that he had retired to some quiet provincial town, to live unknown and in peace.

After some months, the young man thought of marrying; but as marriage was not a speculation with him, he sought in her whom he might choose, not a great dowry nor a brilliant position, but those solid and Christian virtues which make the happiness of life.

One day, he saw Bertha: her modest and reserved air and perfect dignity pleased him; they seemed to indicate steadiness of character and a well-ordered mind. Several times, he saw her stop in a church on her way, and her piety and recollection at her prayers attested the goodness of her heart and the purity of her life. Every day, he saw her enter the hospital; he supposed she had some sick relative there; and the regularity of her visit seemed to prove that she was a kind, attentive, and faithful friend. He wished to know who she was; for he thought she was worthy to be his wife. He went then to the *lingère* to question her in regard to the young girl who lived with her. What were his surprise and anxiety, on learning that this modest work-woman was the daughter of Mr. David, and that Mr. David was in the hospital!

Hermann had not forgotten that he owed to this worthy man his reconciliation with his uncle; he thought the time had come when he could acquit

himself of a debt of gratitude; he resolved to remove Mr. David from the hospital, and give him a position worthy of him; and, on the other hand, all that the *lingère* had said of Bertha determined him to take her for his wife, if her father would consent. The good woman who had received Bertha told him that Mr. David was dangerously ill, and that the Abbé Bernard, whose address she gave him, was the best friend of the unfortunate old man.

Hermann called immediately on Father Bernard, who had just returned home. "If you wish to see Mr. David," said he sadly, "you must come quickly; your friendship will be very precious to him in his last hour. As to his daughter, I do not wish to discourage you, my friend, but do not be too confident of obtaining her consent; the poor child has suffered so much in the world, that I doubt if she will ever consent to return to it."

"But," said Hermann, "her time of trial is past now."

"Yes," replied Father Bernard, "and after her long sufferings, she will need rest; and where can she find it better than in our holy religion? But let us go quickly if you wish to see Mr. David; as for him, he will not see you."

"What?" said Hermann, turning pale.

"Has not the *lingère* told you? Mr. David is blind."

"Blind! Oh! how many misfortunes at once! Ah! you are right, sir; Bertha has suffered much; no wonder that she fears life now."

They arrived at the hospital just in time. That

very morning, Mr. David had received the last sacraments; he was dying, and the physician declared that he could not live through the day. He turned his sightless eyes toward the door as Hermann entered, and the young man trembled under the painful impression of that vacant glance. But the face of the dying man reflected the assured calm of a good conscience; his features were impressed even with a heavenly joy; it was the joy of the slave who feels his chain breaking, of the unhappy exile whose feet at last touch the soil of his country: it was more—it was that of the Christian, who, full of faith and resignation, returns to his God.

Bertha and Sophie, kneeling beside the bed, wept silently, while the almoner of the hospital recited the prayers for the dying, to which Mr. David responded with a voice enfeebled by the approach of death. Hermann sprang toward him, and seizing one of his hands, covered it with tears. "My God!" said Mr. David, "is this an illusion? Have I yet a friend upon earth, or—"

"It is Hermann, my friend," said Father Bernard.

"Hermann!" replied Mr. David, "Hermann! it is a son also. My God, I thank thee—my daughter will not be without friends! Hermann, I recommend to you, Bertha, my poor orphan!" Then he pronounced incoherently a few words, of which only, "My daughter—Hermann—Sophie—" were distinguished.

Hermann fell upon his knees. What would he not have given to prolong for one quarter of an hour the

life which was now going out! But when he raised his head, the priest placed upon Mr. David's breast the crucifix which had fallen from his dying hand. Father Bernard closed reverently the eyes of his departed friend, and Sophie led away Bertha, almost fainting, in her arms.

The next day, a modest hearse conveyed the remains of the worthy man to their last resting-place. Only two friends followed: Father Bernard and Hermann.

XXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN Bertha's first grief was past, Hermann returned to Father Bernard, to beg him to speak in his favor. Though the worthy priest knew the uselessness of the step, he would not refuse. If Bertha intended to marry, it was certainly Hermann, whose fine qualities he appreciated, whom he desired for her; but he knew that Miss David wished to consecrate her life to God. Still, she was so young, and the misfortunes which had overwhelmed her had been so sudden and terrible, that it was possible that her forlorn condition had induced this resolution, and that the prospect of a happier future might cause her to change. She was about to enter as a novice, but she was under no vow, and was entirely mistress of her destiny. Father Bernard consented, then, to charge himself with Hermann's request; and accordingly both went to the house of the *lingère*.

Sophie was with Bertha, she having come to call on her young companion. Father Bernard made known Hermann's hopes to the orphan, and advised her to consider them seriously. Bertha blushed. Hermann's offer flattered her; perhaps, under other circumstances, she would have been happy to give

him her hand; but she had suffered too much, the remembrance of the misfortunes which she had experienced and of which she had been the first cause was too keen for her ever again to enjoy tranquil happiness. She felt that God alone could give her peace, and quiet the remorse of her conscience. She loved Sophie as a sister, and that affection ought to suffice to her. She thanked Hermann, therefore, for an offer which honored her; but said that she had made in her heart a vow to consecrate herself to God.

The young man retired sorrowfully. When he had gone, Bertha rose, turned toward Sophie, and, taking her hand, said with resignation, "Let us go, my sister!"

One year after this, a grand marriage took place in the Church of St. Germain-l'Auxerrois; it was Hermann's. He had yielded to the wishes of his relatives, and married an heiress—a good match, according to the world.

There was also a festival in the chapel of the Sisters of Charity: a young novice came to take the veil. This new daughter of St. Vincent was Bertha, who consecrated to God and to the suffering, her entire life in expiation of a fault of her childhood.

THE END.

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